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## LADIES IN PANTS



# **Ladies in Pants**

A HOME FRONT DIARY

**by Mable R. Gerken**



EXPOSITION PRESS • NEW YORK

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**Title page drawing by Wanda Belle Gerken**

**PRINTED IN U. S. A.**

FEB 9 - 1950

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TO MY FAMILY

*who have put up with my nonsense*

*for so many years*





## Author's Preface

"THERE WILL BE WARS AND RUMORS OF WAR." There always were and there always will be. We cry peace, peace, yet there is no peace. As long as there are two ways of life, there will be people on each side—people who are sure their way is right. There will be men and women on one side willing to work, fight, and die if necessary, for what they believe is right; for freedom, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

There will be people on the other side, who know nothing of the joys of being a free people, who fight and die for their country because they must fight, for if they refuse, they die anyway.

This is a story of the women of America—the women who stood behind the men who stood behind the guns in the second world war, the women who left the comforts and pleasures of their homes and swarmed into the factories and shipyards.

The hundreds of fighters, bombers, and Victory Ships turned out between 1942 and V J-Day are concrete evidence of what the women of America can do, the proof of what they have done and can do again if disaster ever threatens our land, whether it be another Pearl Harbor or another Judas.

It is a well known fact that women of all stations of life volunteered their services in aircraft factories and shipyards, women who had never been inside a factory before. Who is to say they didn't accomplish the same jobs as the men?

Those of us who had the privilege of entering these plants, of helping to turn out bombers and fighters, will never forget, any more than the boys on the battle front will forget, the satisfaction of knowing that we stood shoulder to shoulder with other women, willing to work night and day that our children might live in a free country.

It was in December of 1942 that the radios broadcast for help. It was then that my niece, Fausteen, stopped by to tell me she had "enlisted." "We women have to get in and pitch," she said, her voice full of anxiety. "Do you know we might lose this war?"

I couldn't grasp the idea at first. Fausteen was a very prominent dancing teacher from Omaha, Nebraska. When she decided to move here, we had very carefully selected the proper location for her dance studio. She was doing well.

"But what about your school?" I objected.

"We won't worry about it just now," she said, "I'm working graveyard—midnight till seven A.M.; you can work the same hours. We have to do it!" I was convinced. The next night she stopped by again. I had talked to my family, my husband and two married sons. They thought I was too old. Nearly fifty.

It was on January 7, 1943 that I began two years and seven months of the darkest, most strenuous, nerve-racking time of my life. I never knew when I left home whether the plant would be blown to bits before I returned; whether I would return to hear that Southgate had been destroyed, my son included; or Hollywood, where my older son was experimenting with radar. My husband, I felt, was more or less safe as his office and our home is in the middle of nowhere, so of no value to the enemy.

But all those things have been written again and again. There is nothing I can add to the worries and the sorrows of the mothers who smilingly sent their sons to battle, never to see them again.

There is nothing I can add to the fathers who clasped their son's hands for the last time, hoping and praying this would be the last generation of war, hoping and praying for the eternal peace that failed to materialize after World War I, when they themselves had shouldered a gun.

No, there is nothing you haven't read about the dark side of the war, so this, then, will be the story of the women who piled the dishes in the sink and caught a "share-the-ride" car full of other housewives doing their bit to bring victory and peace to

America. It will be the experiences of a few women in one plant. Multiply it by the hundreds of wartime industries, and you will find the average American woman.

I have recorded in my diary all the humorous, simple, homey things that happened—the funny things that lightened the long dark hours on graveyard and accelerated the hectic hours on Days.

I want to share these experiences with the women who lived them with me and also with the women who, for one reason or another were unable to. I find recorded under the date of January 7, 1943, the following entry: After spending two days taking my entrance examinations, I'm in: I've had my picture taken (what a picture!), fingers printed, eyes examined, stripped stark naked for a physical, had my chest X-rayed, and been blood tested. I've been accepted in Uncle Sam's home-front army. I pledge my best services until the war is won.

I started to attend school here at the factory at midnight last night. Will work graveyard shift at school the same as I will later in the plant. Midnight to seven A.M.

This is my first public appearance in slacks. My hips and rear are much too large. I am fat and forty-oddish. I was walking down the aisle this morning with a group of fellow students when I spotted a large woman walking ahead of us. I turned to my neighbor and said, "I suppose I'm about the size of that woman." She sized up the other woman, turned and looked me over and said, "Hell No!" Now I am worried because I don't know whether I look better or worse. Slacks are compulsory, so I'll have to do some thing about the fat. . . .

I find this rather personal and perhaps should censor it; yet, there are thousands of women who could have written the same thing. So I let it stand. I will let the whole diary stand as I have written it. It is not a masterpiece of literature. I may even blush when or if I stop to analyze it, but I give it to you as it happened. I have changed the name of everyone, so that no one will be embarrassed—except, perhaps, myself.

If, by chance, you find yourself in these pages, rest assured

that no one else will recognize you because you will be described differently and have a fictitious name. If you find your name, think nothing of it. It doesn't mean you. In a group of fifty thousand people there is bound to be more than one Marguerite, Mary Ann, Helen, Jane, Tom, Dick, or Harry. Have fun!

*January 8, 1943*

This is the strangest school you can imagine. It is in the center of a huge building about 700 feet long and 300 feet wide. Probably sixty feet high. That's my guess anyhow, right or wrong. A row of bombers being completed take up one half of the building, while small assemblies, blueprint tables, tools and machinery fill the other half.

There are about thirty-eight or forty in the class. New ones coming in each day or so and others leaving to work on production. They are mostly women from twenty to sixty years old, who have no knowledge of mechanics. They tell me the men who apply for work are sent directly to the line. We have two young men teachers, who have worked in the plant for some time. They know their job, but I don't think they consider the fact that we beginners don't know the difference between a rivet gun and a drill. It is very confusing. Also noisy.

We go into a soundproof conference room for lectures and instructions. It is about fourteen feet by twenty, with a large blackboard at one end, and the rest of the room filled with benches.

We all rush in and grab a seat as though our life depended upon it, and there weren't enough for everyone. Reminds me of musical chairs. Only, there always are enough chairs. We have our Standard Aircraft Manual to study, and paper on which we draw pictures of the different sections of the bomber. I shall save mine. It is a masterpiece! Shows the fuselage, wings, stabilizer, dorsal fin, rudder, landing flap, landing gear, bomb door, machine guns, etc. We copied it as the instructor drew it on the black board. He told us a story before starting class. He said we looked so tense we needed to relax. I guess we did, because I, for one, am scared stiff.

You can't imagine how these bombers affect one until you get mixed up with them. I'd sure hate to be the enemy when a hundred or so of them go over dropping their bombs.

The story was about a man who stepped up to the bar and ordered some liquor. He drank it, chewed up the glass, and put



the stem back on the bar. The bartender looked at him rather accusingly, so he said, "Guess you think I'm crazy."

"You sure are," the bartender replied, "The stem is the best part of it."

*January 12, 1943*

Now we know all about how the bombers are built. At least we think we do. They are made up of many sections called assemblies, each built separately in jigs. Even the smallest assemblies are put together in jigs. A jig is a permanent position, a frame, or scaffold.

Checking our tools in and out of the tool crib is quite a stunt. Everyone tries to talk the girl into giving them the same tools each day. We imagine some are better than others, especially the files. Then too, I notice some of the older girls meet the day shift and check their tools in and out to day shift at the same time. If they do the same with swing shift, of course they will get the same ones back next day. Then, of course, there is the question of time. We can't quit until the whistle blows, and after it does, we all rush madly at the same time.

We are really working with the tools. To begin with, we had to cut a piece of aluminum twelve inches square, then file it until it was smooth on all four sides and a perfect square. This is the second day I have tried to square mine. Finally the instructor noticed that I was still filing, while others were marking their material or drilling. He stood beside me a second, then taking the metal and square from my hand, he asked, "Which is your basic side?"

"My basic side?" I stammered, "I don't know."

"You don't know!" he glared at me, "Why don't you know? Didn't you mark it?" Wonder what he thinks I am, a mind reader?

"I should have known the basic side," I laughed, "Shouldn't I?"

He held the metal up and looked at all its edges. They were as smooth as glass but nearly diamond shape instead of square.

I should never have laughed.



He threw it in the scrap box (my two day's work), and said "Go cut yourself another twelve inch piece, file one edge straight, mark it, square the edge to the right of it; then the one to the left of it; the top will be square. You never in God's world could make a square by going around and around."

I grabbed a pair of metal shears from the bench nearest me and whacked off a twelve inch piece of aluminum from a large sheet. I clamped it in a vise and filed it vigorously. It didn't take me ten minutes. I marched over to where he was helping another girl and handed it to him. I intended to show him that I was as smart as any one, if some one took the trouble to instruct me. His eyes crinkled at the corners, but his mouth was firm.

"Now," he said, "go make yourself another one."

I did. Then I took a foot rule and marked off one inch squares on both of them, put the two pieces together, put them in a vise and drilled holes in the four corners of the square. You see, I not only learned how to get a square square, but I learned to keep my eyes open and see what the rest of the class was doing. We put a cleco in all four holes to secure it.

A cleco looks like a large metal bobby pin and is used for about the same purpose: to hold material in place. It is pushed through a hole with a cleco gun, and is taken out again with the same gun.

Next we drilled a hole in each corner of the one inch markings. Then we were ready to rivet. Martha and I had been sitting together at lunch and rest periods, so we automatically became partners. It takes two to rivet. One puts the rivet in the hole with a rivet gun, while the other uses the bucking bar. A bucking bar is a solid chunk of metal which is placed behind the rivet to flatten it out on the underneath side so it will hold tight. We change off, first one riveting while the other bucks, then vice versa.

Martha is a little younger than I, and quite thin. She has very dark hair and her black eyes fairly snap when she laughs. Also when she is annoyed. We finished both our squares, and I was proud of our work. It looked like a silver pillow with rows

of brass buttons. While I was dreaming about whether or not we would be allowed to take them home, our instructor said, "Tomorrow you can drill the rivets out and put in larger ones."

*January 13, 1943*

Drilling out rivets is much harder than putting them in. There seems to be a trick to it that the instructor has mastered, but it will take time to catch on. The main thing is to get the drill straight and in the center of the rivet. The head is curved and the drill usually runs off sideways and that scratches the aluminum. It does it so quickly that you don't know it until it's too late. That is one thing we dare not do when we are working on the bomber. Scratches weaken the material and weak spots may cause an accident and several lives. We are told that again and again.

*January 15, 1943*

I wonder if I will ever forget how things look under the peculiar lights we have here. The first thing that shocked me was the people's faces. They were ghastly, like a dead person's! The first look at them, before you realize it's the lights, is enough to scare the daylights out of you. Just for an instant you wonder what kind of people you are going to work with. Then you see your own hands. Then the clothes. Even the men were decked out in various shades of lavender and purple. That is the way blue looks. Yellow, pink and green are very pretty, although quite a different shade than when in a natural light.

My first day here I had a real ham sandwich. It was delicious. Then I looked at it. It looked spoiled. And you should see a tomato: We still eat our lunch, but we don't look at it.

*January 18, 1943*

Well, ten days of school. Filing metal, drilling holes, riveting, bucking, drilling and filing again. This morning at one o'clock, our instructor called eight women aside, including Martha and me.

"You are to go with Mr. George," he said. "You are needed on the line." Did I say once before that I was scared stiff? Well right now I'm petrified. "But," I managed to object, "I don't think I'm good enough to rivet on a bomber."

"You may never see a rivet gun again, I hope," he laughed. He could see I was puzzled so he picked up a rivet gun and showed me how he held it, then handed it to me. "Your hands are too small," he said.

That after ten days! They were not dull days by any means. We had a half hour for lunch and ten minute rest periods. We all sat along the aisle on benches and compared notes and told stories. Some of the women were refined, others not so much so. Some were really tough, and others thought it was smart to act tough. They were housewives, clerks, office girls, waitresses, retired teachers and even a librarian.

They were tall and short, thin and fat. No matter what size, age, color, or background, there is a place for every woman to do her share in winning a war.

Mr. George took us to the main office. From there we were escorted to building twelve. It is the largest building in the plant.

One of the most beautiful girls I have ever seen met us in the center of the building. Her name is Betty and she is the supervisor's clerk. She was wearing a navy blue (purple) slack suit which accentuated the curves, and a yellow blouse, bobby sox and a yellow rose in her hair. She asked each of us our age, then introduced Martha and me, who were the oldest, to Bill, who signed us in on a job ticket. The other six girls followed Betty to another department. Bill is B Lead on the center section of the fuselage. He is a cute little fellow with curly dark hair, just turning gray at the temples, and a boyish smile. It's hard to tell how old anyone is in these lights.

"You girls are to be skimmers," he informed us. "Go over to the tool crib and get yourselves a cleco gun." We looked at each other a second and then started where he had pointed. At least we knew what a cleco gun was. We soon found that the skin was the aluminum sheeting.

The girls on our position were good about helping us get started. Some one had had to help them, they said. The whole morning we were putting skin on the bomber. Not riveting it, of course, but, nevertheless, we are quite as important as the riveters.

There are framers who put the metal frame together, then skinners who put the skin on and hold it in place by putting clecos every foot or so until the riveters can rivet it. Just like basting a quilt. After the rivets in between are bucked on, the cleco is taken out and a rivet put in its place. My hand and arm hurt like the dickens. The girls say it is because I am using muscles I haven't used before.

*January 19, 1943*

Well, I had my first big disappointment today. Martha and I were so happy when we went home yesterday. We expected to come back today and finish up where left off. The line had moved four times since we quit, so our plane was down four positions and looked practically finished. Guess we each expected to build a bomber. We just started over on another plane, and of course, found out that is all we have to look forward to.

The skin comes in different sized pieces, each with a number on it. Some are long and narrow, others nearly square. They are put on like shingles on a roof, only they are much larger. The fuselage is built in four sections: the forward section, the center section, the rear half, and the tail section. We are working on the center section. Some sections where the skin laps, the clecos are not strong enough to hold, so we have to put temporary bolts in. Today I pushed the bolts through from the inside and Martha put the nuts on the outside. Tomorrow we will change off.

There are four girls working at this position. The other two know what they are doing and Martha and I do what they tell us. Bill comes by every little while and looks things over. He has charge of a whole row of fuselages that are being worked by different girls at the same time. I say girls, although here and there you do see a man. The Leads are mostly men.



*January 20, 1943*

Boy, we sure broke our necks this morning from six-thirty to quitting time. We partly skinned another plane. Martha put the row of bolts in, about two dozen. I put the nuts on the outside. I had no idea it was so easy. When I was on the inside yesterday and Martha was putting the nuts on, she seemed to have quite a bit of trouble tightening them, but they went on slick for me. I was commencing to think I was pretty good. The upper skin seemed to be in the way, however, so I called one of the older girls. "Is there something we should do about this top skin?" I shouted.

"That's what you're bolting down," she yelled back at me.

"It's not what I'm bolting down," I said.

She was on top of the jig, but in less time than it takes to tell it, she was beside me. "Hell's bells!" she shouted, "You're only putting the bolt through one piece of skin. A hell of a lot of good that would do!"

Martha was practically standing on her head inside the plane, trying to catch what was going on. I flew to the steps to tell her. We have to shout as the drillers and riveters make so much noise you can't hear.

"Grab your wrench," I yelled "and hold those bolts while I take the nuts off." Of course she couldn't see any sense in that as we had just put them on, so she had to crawl out of the plane and see for herself.

The day shift commence to straggle in about six-thirty and perch themselves here and there waiting for time to go to work. Our fingers sure flew because we didn't want them to find out how dumb we were. Or rather, how dumb I was.

*January 21, 1943*

You'd think we were a couple of heroes this morning, the way the girls crowded around us, kidding us about the mistake we made with the bolts.

"No use feeling bad," they chattered and giggled, "we all do it, sooner or later." Each one had her own private boner to

relate. Yesterday we were all strangers; today we are friends. Even Bill patted me on the shoulder and said, "Cheer up, Mable, the worst is yet to come."

It certainly is a relief when the whistle blows for lunch or rest period. The noise all stops and we can breath freely again. We dash madly to the row of benches just as we did in school. Some smoke, some bring something to eat, but most of us rush for the candy machine. They say candy gives you energy. I guess I am forgetting my figure now that I have more important things on my mind.

The few minutes of quiet gives us a chance to get acquainted. There are women from most of the states in the union. Some live here, others have come to the coast to help win the war. They will return home when the war is over. Mary I am particularly fond of. She is a farmer's wife. She was raised on a farm back in Kansas. She married a Kansas farmer, and they have two children. They are living with relatives and the children are in school. The father works days, and Mary works graveyard. They are saving their money, buying bonds, and dreaming dreams of returning to a farm of their own in Kansas.

Betty flits by every now and then, spreading sunshine with her smile. She is positively a breath of spring, sunshine, and flowers. I still think she is the loveliest girl I have ever met.

*January 24, 1943*

Fausteen reaches the car each morning before I do. She works in Building One, so has only half as far to walk. She looked grim this morning as she pushed the key in the lock. I noticed she had been watching me from the parking lot. I was jumping over the wire ropes instead of walking in the road as I was supposed to do.

"Say," she called to me, "don't you know you're not allowed to cut across?" She was smiling wryly.

"Don't be silly," I said, "we always do that."

"Well," she said, "I had a lecture on how to walk this morning, so I thought I'd pass it on to you."

"You what?" I asked. Fausteen has a perfect walk; long years of dancing and teaching dancing have made her erect, graceful, and charming.

"That's right," she said, placing one hand behind her hip, the other behind her head, and with a little twist she took slow mincing steps the length of the car and back again. "This is the way I walk."

"Yeh?" I said.

"And this is the way I'm supposed to walk." She bent forward, taking quick long strides, her arms swinging at her sides.

Of course I laughed.

"Well," she said, "it makes me mad. *Him* telling *me* how to walk."

I am very fortunate to have Fausteen for a driver, as she picks me up at home and returns me home. Most of the "share-the-ride" cars let you off on the main highway, and you have to walk two or three blocks.

*January 30, 1943*

This graveyard shift certainly mixes one up. I hardly know what day it is. I come to work one day and go home the next. I punch the time clock at my leisure anywhere from eleven-thirty P.M. to midnight.

But coming home is a different story. Every one tries to get to the clock at one time. We grab coat, lunch pail, purse, or what have you, and push and crowd like a hundred mad people. They tell me about fifty thousand people work here now. Three shifts. It's a good thing they have plenty of time clocks. One for each department, I presume. The funny part of it is, no one wants to clock out until one minute after seven because it looks bad to the Army. So we line up and wait until the first person decides it is one minute after. Then, after all the scramble, no one is more than three minutes after seven clocking out. We do it every day.

We swarm out of all the different doors of all the different buildings and melt together in a huge wave of humanity. The



loud speaker sings out with "Stars and Stripes Forever," and we hurry, heads up and shoulders back, through the tunnel under the street to the parking lot and try to remember where we left our car the night before. Whoever thought of the music really has something. We are all so tired we don't know whether we can drag from building twelve to our car or not. It is approximately a mile. Then we get to swinging to the march time and before we know it, there we are.

*February 10, 1943*

Yesterday afternoon we were on top of the hill near here. We stopped our car and looked in the direction of the plant. There was nothing there except a small town. Houses with trees and shrubs, streets going both ways. You couldn't tell where the mock village stopped and the real one started. It is truly concealed. An enemy aircraft would never suspect that it was built on top of the buildings. The wire covering with imitation grass extends across the street and parking lot. Rumor has it that our plant is one of the hardest to detect from the air. Everyone is passing the story around that they have apartments for rent. Also that the Army and the F.B.I. have rooms up there.

There are usually six officers at the center tunnel where we go in and out. Sometimes there are one or two women. We show our identification card with our picture (what a picture!) on it, our badge, and open any lunch pail or package we may have.

The north tunnel is about the same. The south tunnel and gate have fewer police, as less people come in and out that way. The south-bound busses stop on the west side of the street. That lets part of the crowd through the gates. The north-bound ones stop on the east side of the street, and those people come through the tunnels, as do the workers who drive cars. Inside the center tunnel is a man selling nickels. Dozens of people crowd around him, pushing and shoving. I crowded in too. When in Rome, do as the Romans do. He was handing out nickels and taking in quarters, halves, and dollars. The candy, gum, and cigarette machines were the answer.

*February 1, 1943*

We had a forty-five minute Bond Rally at the band stand. Seven-thirty for our shift, two-thirty for second shift and four P.M. for first shift. "Block Buster" insignias were given to people already buying bonds through the payroll savings plan. We are paid every Saturday.

You should see the build up:

1. There's no better way to save. United States War Bonds are the most sound investment we can make. They pay twice as much interest as you get in the banks.

2. Put your dollars to work, too. We on the production front are doing a big job, and doing it well. But Uncle Sam needs the help of our dollars too in paying for the tools of Victory.

3. Keep taxes down. We can help keep taxes down by buying plenty of War Bonds.

4. 10 per cent is darn little to pay for freedom. The kid next door who comes home from Guadalcanal with only one leg was fighting for you and me, and he gave lots more than 10 per cent.

5. Uncle Sam is counting on us. Let's show the government that we can not only do a real job of building airplanes, but are patriotic Americans in every other way too.

6. Bonds are post-war buying power. When the war is over, lots of us are going to want new automobiles, etc. It's going to be darn handy to have a sock full of War Bonds.

7. Our Bonds can prevent inflation. The largest national income in history has created billions of dollars of excess purchasing power that may cause an inflation that would be a disaster for all wage earners, because it will zoom up prices of everything we buy.

8. This is not another deduction. It is a profitable form of saving. You are not giving. You are lending.

*February 14, 1943*

I was trying to decide whether I should buy the required tools to keep my job or give up, when Bill sauntered over to the jig.

"Are you having trouble?" he asked.

"My arm pains and my back aches," I replied, "and here is a request that I purchase tools." I handed him the paper. "It looks as if they expect to keep me on the job."

He knew that my application for employment asked for the P.B.X. board, office, or stockroom work. "Come with me," he said, "Lew needs a stock clerk."

I followed him over to the next aisle, past the skinning jigs to the framing department. A tall, stout young fellow with thinning light hair paused as we approached. "Mable," Bill said, "This is Lew."

Lew hesitated some time before he would commit himself. He looked me over from head to foot, and I was glad I had on a new slack suit and had taken the time to pull a few curls from under my bandanna, so I didn't look quite so much like a peeled onion.

Finally he asked, "Have you done stockroom work?"

"I'm familiar with the procedure," I evaded. He said he wasn't quite ready for a stock clerk, but as long as I was there, I could stay for the time being. I was shown to R.P.6A. As he and Bill walked away, I heard him say, "You might know they'd be old or fat if they come in my department." That should hold me for a while. I wonder how old they are. These lights make you look ten years older than you really are, but they don't make you look fat. I shall weigh myself today.

*February 15, 1943*

I still hope for the P.B.X. board, as I have just taken a brush-up course and have been taking my turn at the twenty-four hour Control Center at the City Hall.

Former telephone operators man the Station. There is really nothing to do, only answer a few calls a night. It is an emergency set-up, and a fine one too. I shall continue to take my turn as my hours are in the evening. I go to the City Hall on certain days from eight P.M. to eleven P.M., then take the bus to the Plant.

There are direct lines from the police department, fire sta-

tions, telephone company, electric and water departments, hospitals, doctors' residences and various other agencies, including the Red Cross.

Last week I worked with a girl from day shift. They had quite a joke on me. They sent me out to buy some coffee as we have a stove and coffee pot. We drink very little coffee at home, so I hurried to three different stores before I found out that there is no coffee for sale. They are going to ration it. When I got back to the station they had coffee made and rolls to go with it.

*February 18, 1943*

Our supervisor's desk is just about fifteen feet from my counter. His name is David. Sitting very tall and erect, he bends forward from the waist when he talks to Betty, who sits on the opposite side of his desk, the keys of her typewriter clicking rhythmically between them. He might even have a board down his back, as he never hunches his shoulders as most people do when they bend forward. He is probably about twenty-five. He talks to Betty continually. Probably dictating, but I sure wish I could hear what he says. He never smiles. He never speaks to people unless they stop to talk to him. Then he is stern.

Betty is adorable; she smiles and speaks to everyone who passes her desk. Her glossy brown hair tumbles in a riot of curls over her forehead, and her brown eyes remind you of a mischievous puppy. She can't be over eighteen. Her fingers fairly fly on the typewriter. Today she slipped into the stockroom to powder her nose. It was like a breath of fresh air. No strong perfume, just the faint odor of the rose she had tucked in her hair. (I wonder where she gets the roses.)

"Do you think you are going to like us?" she asked.

"I'm sure I will," I answered, "only I'm afraid I won't have work enough to keep me here."

"We're going to keep you here!" she said authoritatively, "if you get bored, I'll find you some work."

I've only been here a few nights, but so far this stockroom work is more like being a night watchman. Outside of checking



in a few parts and putting them in the proper bins, there is very little to do. I keep taking the parts out of the bins, counting and dusting them, and putting them back in again to keep awake. From midnight to seven A.M. is no time to sit around if you expect to keep awake.

*February 24, 1943*

I like my job better every day. I'm learning to sleep in the daytime, and my arm has quit paining me since I gave up the cleco gun. The day girl comes in just before I leave, and I come in just before the swing shift girl leaves. I don't know why we call each other girls, they are both as old as I am. Or is it the lights? We always have a few minutes to compare notes and pass along a few rumors.

Things are very confusing here, whether accidentally or on purpose. The first day, I opened the log book where we enter our parts, and at the top of the page I read: "Receiving point 6B is in the southeast end of the building. You will be asked a hundred times a day." And I guess I have at that. This is receiving point 6A. Across the aisle is receiving point 4A. They are in the center of the building. We call them receiving points, not stockrooms. But they are stockrooms to me because we keep the stock in them.

All the parts, whether made in another department of the plant, or purchased from a vendor, are sent to D.P. 12. Records are kept there of what departments use the different parts. They are routed to those departments, and stored in the receiving points to be issued out as production needs them.

We log them in our book, compare the parts with those we already have, to be sure they are right, then bundle them in packages of twenty and put them in the proper bin. Each bin has a bin card on the front of it with the number of the part, and the group it is put on. We are allowed to tape them in any amount we desire, but yesterday I put ten stiffeners together because they were heavy to handle, and today I find they are taped two together, so hereafter I will tape everything in twenties. I think

it is very important that all shifts work in harmony.

I have been studying the part numbers. I suppose there is a good reason for them to be as they are, but you would think they would be in rotation. We have angles stamped 1788-1 and 1788-2 etc. The one may be on one side of the stockroom and the other on the other side, instead of being next to it.

I have not learned the names of the parts yet. Neither have the girls on the line. One girl came up to the counter today and said, "I want ten ships of those little do-jiggers up there," pointing to the box she meant. I showed them to her. "No," she said, "that's the right side, I want the left. It's in the next box." I pulled out the next bin. "That's it," she said, "now I have to have the little curly-cue and that straight piece that goes on them."

"You better come find them," I told her. They have been used to helping themselves, as there hasn't been a stock clerk working on graveyard. What she actually got was a lever, a spring, and two angles, for each assembly.

*March 1, 1943*

This is the worst place for passing the buck that I ever got into. I asked Charlie about some parts on an assembly. He said, "Oh, I don't work that job, you'll have to ask Bill." I asked Bill and he said, "Well, I wouldn't know if those could be used or not, because that's Lew's job." I asked Lew and he said, "Oh, that's a new assembly and the girl who works on it isn't here today, you'll have to ask Charlie."

I stood there a minute with my hands on my hips, staring at him. Finally I said, "That's where I came in."

He gave me a searching look, because, of course, it didn't make sense to him. I turned on my heel and stalked back to my stockroom.

The more I thought it over the more puzzled I became, until finally I decided to have a show down. I cornered Bill. He was my first Lead, so I guess it was natural to expect him to clear things up. "Now listen," I said, "these parts came in today. Here's the card saying they belong here, so I accepted them. Now, where

do they belong? I don't find any more like them, so I don't even know whether they are right or not, and why is it that everyone I ask knows no more about it than I do?"

Bill's eyes twinkled, and he patted me on the shoulder. "Now take it easy, Mable," he laughed, "There isn't one of us who has been in this department more than four months."

"Four months," I exclaimed, "That's not possible!"

"Well, you know it's the impossible things that are pushing the bombers right off the line and into action."

*March 10, 1943*

We have a large box in the stockroom that we sit on. This morning I peeped into receiving point 4A as I clocked in, and saw quite a nice bench, so when I caught Lew and Bill together I said, "I want to show you what the girls in 4A have." I took them over and showed them.

"That's nothing," Bill said, "it's too small, too high—"

"Yeh, and look at the way it's built," Lew added.

Later today, Lew came in dragging half a dozen boards about six feet long. They were covered with cement.

"What in the world are those?" I asked.

About that time Bill showed up with a saw, hammer, and a handful of nails. While Bill sawed the boards, Lew rounded up some scraps of padding, but no one could find a cover. They soon had the bench together and it was a sorry sight. I spent half the morning scraping the cement off the boards. I have some tan material, upholstering braid and nails at home. Just wait until tomorrow.

*March 11, 1943*

The bench is complete, and what do you think? It is large enough for me to curl up on and sleep. I spent my lunch period that way this morning. "Go ahead," Betty insisted, "if the whistle doesn't get you up, I will."

The whistle is almost over my stockroom, so I knew it would wake me up. The stockroom is closed on three sides and just open



at one end where the counter is, so it is quite private at the one end.

I just heard today that until recently they just had two stockrooms in building twelve. One at each end of the building. Production helped themselves to what they wanted.

Now there is a rumor that they are going to make a new department altogether, consisting of nothing but stockrooms. Now I am working under Bill and Lew, and they are working under David.

According to the rumor, we will have a supervisor and lead men of our own. Betty and David have asked to keep me in R.P.6A. That's a pretty nice compliment, although I don't think David has much to say about it. I think Betty is the real supervisor. What she says goes with him. She told Lew to bring me over a typewriter from the office, so he brings one over each morning and takes it back before we go home. When I haven't anything else to do I type records for both Bill and Lew. It keeps me from going to sleep and helps them.

I know now why Lew said he always got the old or fat women in his department. His section is on the floor and Bill's section is the high jigs. And speaking of fat women—I have gained six pounds this last month. Too many candy bars.

*March 20, 1943*

Bill sat on my bench for about an hour today studying his records, tickets, and a list of names. I was doing some typing for him and I couldn't figure out what he was doing. Finally I asked him.

"Mable," he said, "this is the hardest job I have. I'm grading my girls."

"You're not doing it right," I joked, "The way I heard it, you look them over, pick out the cutest ones and give them the best grades."

"Now, where did you hear that?" he asked.

"Oh, that's general knowledge."

"Well, it's not true no matter where you heard it. Take this girl Ellen," he said, pointing to a name, "she's been with

the company several months and she's good. On the other hand, here's Martha, she's only been here a short time and she's just as good. Now, should Martha get a better grade because she can do good work in less time, or Ellen, who has done good work longer? See what I mean?"

Bill is a fellow I'm going to watch; he'll go places.

Bill had no more than left the counter when Lew came over and perched on the corner of my bench. There's not much room for me when he sits down. Not an awful lot of room for him either when I sit down.

"Got to get my girls graded," he said. I continued typing, and in a few minutes he was through and ducking under the counter to be on his way.

"You don't have much trouble grading your girls, do you?" I asked.

"Nope," he said, "they're all good girls. They know what they're doing."

Now I am wondering. Maybe he is right. Maybe Bill was just killing time. Maybe his feet hurt, or maybe he just likes my bench. A girl is either a good worker or she isn't, so what the heck?

The supervisor sits within fifteen feet, and saw both boys do the same job. Or did he see anything except Betty? I have managed to get a grunt out of him in the morning now. I come in singing "Hi David," and he says, "Mornin'."

*March 25, 1943*

Another funny thing happened today. I am getting more or less familiar with the stock bin now, but every once in a while I find more than one kind in a bin. If I have nothing to do I can go to the blue print department and check the print. It is usually the right and left of the same part and should have been stamped dash one and dash two. In that case I take a grease pencil and mark each part correctly. But this lever was something different again. It didn't have a dash number. It was about the size of a cigarette case, some having two prongs and some three. I haven't bothered to pull the print. I always ask whoever comes

for it if they want the two or three prongs. Invariably they will say, "It doesn't make a bit of difference."

The girl who actually works on the assembly doesn't always come for it. Just so that I get a signed issuance card I don't care who gets the parts. However, I always give them the one with the three prongs. It looks so much better. Today I followed the girl out to the jig to see what happened to it, and was I astonished? She cut the middle prong out and threw it in the scrap box.

*March 28, 1943*

I have discovered why the parts are not placed in rotation in the stockrooms. They are arranged so the groups will be together. We have a group card with all the names and numbers that are to be built together. Those parts are placed together to facilitate pulling the assembly. Very simple.

I still wish the supervisor's desk was closer so I could hear what David and Betty are talking about. It is no doubt serious administrative problems, but if you were looking at a movie you would know he was making love to her. I wonder if he is married. I hope not. Betty isn't. I asked her. Some day I will get nerve enough to ask her about David. She really doesn't have a minute to visit. She's not a "Night Watchman" like me. She is very pretty and gracious.

You should see the old men leer at her as they pass her desk. There's something pathetic about an old man when he admires a young girl. He just can't realize that the girl wouldn't care for an old man. Betty smiles at them and humors them, but not with the same gusto she displays for the younger men. I think she is sweet on one young man who works on day shift. He comes in early and visits with her as she gets ready to go home.

*April 1, 1943*

Today we were given a lovely silver "Bond-a-month" pin with the request that we wear it pinned on our shoulder. It is a badge of honor to show that we are patriotic. Huh! It has really been quite an event. The "Bond-Ardiers" were appointed

throughout the plant and given a list of employees who were not subscribing to the bond payroll saving plan.

They were given a special note saying: "Keep this entire project confidential. Large banners of a mysterious nature will be hanging in the plant all during the preceding week, but let's not reveal the details as to what "M-week" is. Build up suspense and anticipation.

It really did. Everyone was asking everyone, "What's the 'M' for?" I for one never did find out what the "M" was for, but I'm guessing it stands for Mobilization. It's not a bit surprising that nearly everyone is wearing a pin.

*April 10, 1943*

The girl in receiving point 4A quit yesterday. She had no trouble checking out as she had been absent a great deal. She has three small children and it seems one or the other of them is always catching something. Of course she had to stay home and take care of them. She was a school teacher before her marriage.

Jane is taking her place. Jane was in 4C, which they are eliminating. She is quite a charming woman of the old school. I can picture her in crinolines, her hair piled high and powdered, doing a minuet. She is a little on the plump side, well laced. She wears a blue denim coverall suit that has become lighter by many washings. She must have several all alike, as she always looks spic and span. I'm sure she could carry a book on her head as she goes up and down her ladder pulling assemblies. She is that straight. I guess her to be at least sixty-five years old. She keeps house for a brother.

*April 12 1943*

We had a little thunder last evening when I was trying to catch a few hours sleep before going to work. I pulled the covers tight over my head to shut out the noise. It brought back too vividly a picture of a year or so ago when we had the exciting air raid over our house, the night we were sure we were being bombed.

It was about midnight when we heard the guns and jumped out of bed. Through the long French windows of my bedroom, which I always have wide open, I saw great streaks of sharp 'lightning,' more fantastic than any electric storm I had ever witnessed back in the middle west.

I rushed to the windows and stood fascinated as long fingers of fire streaked back and forth across the sky and down to earth, each streak accompanied by a deafening crash. My husband grabbed me by the arm and pulled me back.

"Come away from that window," he said, "It's an air raid."

He pushed the windows shut, then hurriedly opened them a bit as our air raid instructions were to leave them open to prevent concussion.

"We should crawl under the bed," I ventured, as we stood in the middle of the room looking at each other while the booming and flashes continued.

Finally, in what was probably seconds but seemed like hours, we dove into some clothes and ventured into the other part of the house. We peeped out the west and north windows, then gathered our courage and slipped out the back door. Our curiosity had overcome our better judgment.

We stood between the house and the garage, our eyes riveted to the sky. "We know better than to come outdoors at a time like this," I muttered.

"Yes—yes we do," my husband agreed. But there we stood, and glancing up and down the street we saw all the neighbors looking skyward. They too had disregarded their safety and been drawn toward the exhibition. It was more spectacular than any fireworks.

"Look right up there," my husband pointed, "Doesn't that look like a balloon, or something?"

I stared and stared.

"There are five of them," he stated, "Can't you see them?"

I couldn't.

Next morning the newspapers told of the various things people saw, or thought they saw. Several people were hurt by



flying shrapnel. The tile and plate glass windows in a bank building about a mile from our house were broken and large pits made in the pavement.

We have soldiers with anti-aircraft guns stationed both north and south of us. For a long, long time after that night we lay awake and listened, expecting daily another more vicious attack, which so far hasn't materialized. Now, of course, I leave home before midnight, my mind on turning out bombers to destroy the enemy before he destroys us.

*April 20, 1943*

Fausteen was laughing at me this morning because I always claim I want to stop at the main cafeteria before going to work. It is just inside the first building. She says that ever since she was a little girl I have talked about taking a long walk before breakfast. She thinks I am really doing it now. We park her car in row twelve or thirteen, walk about a quarter of a mile to the tunnel, through the tunnel, and then as far again to building twelve. That is, I do. Fausteen works in building one.

This morning (11:30 last night), we finally stopped at the cafeteria. It was a huge room swarming with men and women. I counted roughly two hundred tables. Four chairs to the table. That's a pretty good sized dining room in any man's language. Most of the workers were lingering over a cup of coffee, while a few were dashing in and out.

We have a small tent cafeteria between building one and two, and between buildings four and twelve. They have several long tables with a bench at each side. They will each seat a couple of hundred at a time. Then, there are several tent lunch-rooms where you can buy sandwiches, pastry, coffee, milk, and ice cream.

It is fun, when the weather is warm, to run out for something and sit around in a group swapping tales. But I like best eating a bite (when the boss isn't looking) and curling up on my bench for a half hour nap.

*May 1, 1943*

The new department is under way. I have been given a new badge, had it taken away, and given back again to me all in the same day. You see, our badge has our number on it, the number of our department, and the number of the building we work in. We are not allowed to roam about the plant, unless we have a badge that permits us to.

Albert is to be our new 'Lead.' I doubt if I shall like him as well as I do Bill and Lew. They are always smiling, and you never hear them curse no matter how aggravated they get at some of the dumb women. They tell me some of the bosses do.

Albert is very tall, about six foot two, good looking except for a too-large nose. He carries his head high, chin protruding, and walks very erect. Coming down the aisle he reminds me of Sherlock Holmes.

Today he lifted the part of the counter that is on hinges and glided into the stockroom, catching Betty with a sandwich and me with a cup of coffee. Most people duck under, but he really would have to double up considerably to make it.

I'm sure my face turned red, and Betty looked like a five year old caught in the cookie jar. We are not supposed to eat during working hours, of course. We are supposed to be working.

He waved his hand majestically, his lips curling in a crooked smile, "Don't mind me," he said.

"If I had a cup," I said, to cover my embarrassment, "I'd offer you some coffee."

He pulled out the bench and perched on one end of it, resting his arm on the counter.

Betty gulped down the remainder of her sandwich and scurried out to her desk. She didn't stop to powder her nose as she usually did. The scent of roses went with her, leaving only that of metal being drilled or filed, and of paint. The paint shop is only about a hundred feet from R. P. 6A.

I screwed the top on my thermos, put it back in my lunch pail, and calmly sat down on the other end of my bench. Albert

said nothing but I could feel his eyes on me. I can't say I like these strong, silent men.

"Am I doing all right?" I finally asked.

"Yes," he stated flatly, "Oh yes, you are doing fine. One of the best stockrooms in the plant." Of course he knows as well as I do that most of the work is done on Days. More silence; then, "Guess you have met Dolly?"

I admitted I had.

"Well," he said, as he slid off the bench, "She is to be your 'C' lead. If you are in doubt about anything, or need supplies, you ask her. She will contact you from time to time."

I drew a deep breath as he left the stockroom.

*May 5, 1943*

In spite of what Bill said about grading his girls, you have only to look at Dolly to know that some leads are chosen for their looks and not for their ability. Dolly is as cute as the proverbial bug's ear. About five feet tall, golden brown curly hair, blue eyes and plenty of curves. An older woman would be called plump, but with an eighteen year old, it's curves. They say she gets five cents an hour more than we girls working under her. I wonder what she does when she gets through asking us if we need anything.

*May 6, 1943*

One of the girls off production dashed into my stockroom this morning and squatted behind the counter. She put a finger to her lips, then pointed to a man coming up the aisle. He was a tall, middle-aged fellow with droopy shoulders, baggy pants, and a smug grin on his face. He ogled Betty as he passed her desk but she was typing furiously and didn't notice him. Before he got to my counter, I grabbed up a pull sheet and started pulling an assembly. The noise was unusually loud and as I glanced about the department I saw all the girls busy filing, riveting and drilling. My mind jumped immediately to the FBI.



This fellow had been running down shortages. That was supposed to be his job—but who knows? After he had passed, this girl unfolded and said, “Did you see that guy?” I nodded my head.

“The damn fool asked me for a kiss yesterday.”

The picture was ridiculous, but I tried not to laugh. “Did you give it to him?” I asked.

“I slapped his goddam face and asked him what the hell he took me for.”

Well, of course, he still could be from the FBI. )

*May 10, 1943*

I had quite a surprise this morning. I was counting levers and had reached 310, when I glanced up to see Velta, a friend of mine for the past fifteen years, standing at the counter. I heard she was working here, but that is like saying that she worked in the same town of fifty thousand population. About the only chance I had of seeing her would be in coming in or going out of the plant.

“Won’t you come in?” I asked in mock courtesy, as I lifted the door of the counter.

“This is not a social call,” she assured me. “I have yet to prove that I belong here.” Knowing her sterling qualities and her capacity for work I couldn’t imagine what she was getting at.

“Well, I guess I could vouch for that,” I said, “but what good would my word be?”

“I don’t know,” she admitted, “but you are the only one I could think of that might help. Do you remember when I worked at that cafe on American Ave.?”

“You mean several years ago?”

“Yes. I gave them as reference on my application for work here. They have sold out, and the new owner has no record of my ever working there. That looks fishy to the Army, so I must prove that I did work there.”

“Why don’t you bake them one of your famous pies or cakes?” I laughed, “that ought to convince them.”

She flashed me a look that said she wasn’t in any frivolous mood, so I said, “Yes, I can swear you worked there.”

"Good," she said, "I sure didn't want to give your name and then have you say you didn't remember."

"Well, cheer up," I flung at her as she hurried down the aisle, "At least we know they are investigating us." I forgot to ask her where she is working, so I probably won't see her again until the war is over, and Heaven only knows when that will be.

*May 20, 1943*

Dolly came in late again this morning. (It is morning if you come in late.) That makes three times this past week. I told her she would be getting fired. She said, "I hope so."

She evidently doesn't like her 'C' lead job. That's too bad. You should hear the howls from the other stockroom clerks because Dolly was made Lead. Everyone thinks she could do better, she has been here longer, is older, or has more ambition. I guess I'm the only one who has no kick. I haven't been here long, I'm too old, too fat, and lack ambition to do anything except to do well whatever I am needed at.

*May 12, 1943*

I was fooling with the typewriter this morning, and look what came out! I showed it to Betty and she handed it to David, then reported back to me that it was going into the Aircraft paper. Now, isn't that something? I don't know the first thing about poetry. Here it is.

#### A WORKER'S PLEA

Let's come to work through rain or shine  
As long as our boys are in the line.  
Let's come to work so all may see  
That we are not an Absentee.

As long as our boys are in the air,  
Let's know that we will do our share.  
As long as they fly o'er the sea,  
Let's never be an Absentee.

Then every time they bomb a Jap,  
Here at home we can loudly clap.  
So we can work in a land that's free,  
Let's never be an Absentee.

We may have our aches and pains;  
So may the boys who are in the planes.  
We may run out of gas, but, golly gee,  
That's no excuse to be an Absentee.

And when the Japs are squelched for fair,  
And bombs no longer are in the air,  
Our boys will all be home to see  
That we have not been an Absentee.

Then we can shake their hands and sigh—  
Then we can look them in the eye.  
And all will know, o'er land and seas,  
We've never yet been Absentees.

*June 12, 1943*

I kissed my studio goodbye yesterday. It took one half of my heart out of me. I really had such an adorable studio to write in. It was twelve feet from our home and had a lovely bay window with steel glass frames and a windowseat cover with fancy pillows. A few sticks of wood in the red brick fireplace would take the early morning chill away, and one whole side was bookcases.

There was no telephone to ring, and the neighbors knew better than to disturb me. I know I'll never get it back.

But, Uncle Sam said he needed war workers, and war workers need a place to live. (My husband's being a builder didn't help any either.) So we built a kitchenette and a shower bath between the studio and the house. With a small electric refrigerator and a gas stove, we made it very livable.

Our tenant moved in. Her name is Diona. She is tall and slender, with her taffy blond hair done page boy. She works on graveyard also, so will ride back and forth with Fausteen and me.

Her husband is in the Army and is stationed at Santa Monica, which isn't too far away. He can run home from time to time.

When I saw them together and realized how happy they were to have a place to call home, I knew I would have been very selfish not to have given up my studio. I will have very little time to write until the war is won. I wonder how long that will be. Years perhaps. One thing I will try not to neglect is my diary. I do want my grandchildren and great-grandchildren to know that the women of America put their shoulders to the wheel and pushed when they were needed.

*June 15, 1943*

They certainly do things around here when they take the notion. This morning (last night) when I rounded the corner of R.P.4A where we clock in, I was about to sing out my usual and coolly received greeting of "Hi David" when I found only a vacant space. Betty, David, desk and all are gone. Even the telephone, wires and all.

I didn't go to work of course, until I found them. They are merged with half a dozen other desks in the south end of the department. Or rather between the two departments. Betty is not a bit happy about it, and is talking of asking for a transfer to another department. I can't say I blame her, because she has always been a 'big frog in a small puddle,' now she will be only a 'small frog in a big puddle.' There is a rumor that David will be transferred to another shift. The only thing that isn't changed is my stockroom and, of course, it looks lost in a big empty space.

*June 20, 1943*

I wish I had started a book of rumors. They fly thick and fast around here continually. The little Spanish girl who works on shortages; the tall handsome fellow from spares; the fat bald-headed supervisor of one department and his secretary; and there is the rumor that Dolly dances till eleven every night, clocks in here, then crawls into some stockroom and sleeps most of the shift. There isn't a place where she could sleep in my stockroom,

so I wouldn't know. I do know I only see her first thing each morning (when she is here)—I wonder what a C Lead is supposed to do. I must ask her. That's one thing I wouldn't want to be, even for the extra five cents an hour that she makes. There are several girls in this department, though, who are almost cutting each other's throats to make an impression on Albert. They don't expect Dolly to last long.

Albert is on the job, and he's nobody's fool. The more I see of him, the better I like him. He is certainly a gentleman.

*June 25, 1943*

Bill and Lew are still on the job as Leads on production. They are keeping their records under my counter, and I still do some typing for them. We had a printed notice, however, that production is not allowed in the stockrooms. That is no doubt Albert's idea, as he is the 'big' Lead. We, the stockroom personnel, are called non-production. We do not actually build the planes. We only supply the parts to build them. In other words, Production Control controls production but does not produce.

In the place of David's desk, they are putting small jigs to make small assemblies which will be installed on the gun turret. Also they are moving the skin racks from the end of my counter so that instead of having a small counter on production side, and a small one on the aisle, I now will have one large U-shaped counter and no privacy at all.

*June 26, 1943*

The funniest thing just happened. I rushed by a large curved skin standing upright. It was six feet high, four feet wide and shone like a mirror. I glanced at myself as I passed and was surprised to see a tall skinny me. I stopped to laugh at myself. Just then Albert walked up the aisle. "We better turn those skins lengthwise," he said. "They might fall over."

I stood watching him, still laughing to myself at how funny I looked. When he had turned them he said, "There, Mable, I think that's much funnier." He stalked on down the aisle with-



out looking back. I took one look and nearly went into hysterics. I was about three feet high and just as broad.

*June 27, 1943*

Fausteen is checking out today. She is looking pale and thin—an example of a great many more women who are working too many hours with too little rest and very little sleep.

I'd like to keep on," she said, "but Mother has convinced me that I will have to give up either the dancing school or the plant." Her school has grown to such an extent that she can no longer keep both jobs.

"It's hard to decide which is the more important," she said.

"If you ask me," I informed her, "I think the children are the more important. There are hundreds of women available to take your place here, but I don't know of one that can teach children dancing as efficiently and as graciously as you can."

That means I will have to find a ride to work.

I asked Albert. "It's very simple," he announced, looking down at me as though I were a child. "You go over to the transportation counter in Building One and fill out an application for a ride. Then contact the names they give you."

It seemed a risky thing to do, crawling into a strange car with a driver you never saw before, his only recommendation being that he lived in your direction and worked at the same place.

I asked Bill.

"What are you afraid of?" he asked. "Everybody's doing it."

Transportation gave me five names. Diona got five names too.

The first one I called had his car full three months ago; the second had moved to Oklahoma; the third had just left on a two-week vacation; the fourth quit driving because he couldn't find riders, so couldn't get gasoline; the fifth had checked out a week ago. Diona dropped by to tell me she was having the same luck. We were terribly upset when I happened to spy Pat riveting on the new turret jig. Pat is about as big as a minute. She is a school teacher and lives a few blocks north of me.

"Pat," I screeched above the noise, "What's the idea, you being here?"

"I'm spending my vacation helping Uncle Sam!" she yelled back.

"You wouldn't be driving?" I asked.

"That I would!" she laughed, "and for a dollar a week I take you both ways."

"Good," I said, "stop in the morning—I mean tonight—there will be two of us." Now, isn't that something? The Lord is surely taking care of us.

*June 29, 1943*

Pat has another school teacher living with her for the summer and working here at the plant. The board of education circulated the idea, they said, that it would be the patriotic duty of all the faculty to take war jobs during the school vacation.

I will be sorry when vacation is over because it is like a three ring circus riding with these girls. What one doesn't think of, the other does. It's going to keep me on my toes to keep up with these three youngsters. Also I must go on a diet, as they are all "slick chicks."

*June 30, 1943*

This morning I glanced up from a shop order to see Albert stomping out of the office. He was heading directly for my stockroom. My chest tightened, and I'm sure my heart skipped a few beats. His face looked stern, and while I'm getting accustomed to his silence, there is always an expression on his face as though a smile might be lurking behind the mask.

When he enters the stockroom, I usually chatter about this assembly or that, about shortages or spares, inventory or Leadmen, just any thing to break the silence. Often he just looks around and leaves without a word. This morning he looked directly at me and I looked at him. My mind was whirling. Perhaps I shouldn't have borrowed those blue prints, or maybe he saw me eating during working hours, but most likely it was because

Bill and Lew still keep their records under my counter.

Out of the blue sky he announced, "I put your name up for C-Lead."

"Oh," I hesitated, while my heart started racing, "I don't know."

"Dolly is being transferred to Days."

"Yes, I know."

"It will mean a raise in salary."

"Yes, but my duties—I don't know a thing—."

"Who does?" he parried.

"But I was to have a week's vacation."

Then, turning on his heel and heading for the office, he flung back, "Starting the tenth of July you will have charge of six stockrooms."

Heaven help me!

*July 10, 1943*

I have a weird feeling, a foreboding of things to come. This was the day (or night) I was supposed to become a C-Lead. Albert was very conspicuous by his absence. I just realized he hadn't mentioned it again since the night he said he had put my name up for C-Lead. He had said, "Beginning July tenth you will have charge of six stock rooms."

There wasn't actually any reason why he should mention it again, unless to give me a little insight into my duties. This is the tenth. No Albert. I've just had a week's vacation and am anxious to do something worth while. It was the first day I'd had off in the six months I'd been at the plant. I really needed it.

Dolly came by as usual and asked in the same listless voice, "Do you need anything this morning?"

"I thought you would be on Days this week," I parried.

"Gosh no," she said, ducking under the counter and sliding onto the other end of my bench, "I don't know when my transfer will go through, if at all."

Dolly has such a pleasing personality that I'd like to shake her good for not having more ambition. Her large blue eyes



encased in long dark lashes could carry a lot of influence if they were not so far-away and dreamy.

One thing is certain: Albert didn't propose me for lead because of my attractiveness. I was fat and forty-odd six months ago when I first started to go to school here. I've gained six pounds since then. Besides, I don't look my best in slacks.

Albert didn't say I was to take Dolly's place. He said, "Dolly is being transferred to Days."

It had been logical to expect that if I was to be a C-Lead, it would be in the department where I am familiar with the personnel, assemblies and procedures. Then I remembered that that isn't the way the Company manages things. When anyone seems to have mastered any particular job, they change him (or her) to another department.

It makes you wonder whether they are training everyone to do any job necessary or if it is for the deliberate purpose of confusing us, or breaking up any "gang" that might develop.

It is very noticeable that more and more women are entering the plant and more and more men are leaving for the front. Also, more women are becoming C-Leads, training other women, and keeping watch for errors. Which means either that we are proving ourselves capable, or that there just aren't enough men.

Dolly has charge of six stockrooms serving production, of which Lew and Bill are leads. Across the aisle is the wing section with another type of stock and other production Leads. Ellen is C-Lead in those stockrooms, still working under Albert. Albert is B-Lead and works under an A-Lead. The supervisor has charge of the whole building.

Day supervisor is considered the High Muck-a-Muck. The swing shift and graveyard supervisors are in charge on their shift, but the main work is done on Days.

*July 11, 1943*

Albert is back tonight, (this morning). I met him in the center aisle where he greeted me with, "You are on your own, you know. Dolly checked out." Just like that. That was really a sur-

prise. Dolly had been trying to quit for weeks and the only satisfaction she got was "You are working for the Army now; you can't just quit." Then she tried transferring to the day shift, but the answer was, "We don't need you on days." Then all of a sudden the Army says "POOF," and she is gone.

"And my duties?" I asked Albert.

He gave me one of those piercing looks and said, "You'll find enough to do without asking me."

"Such as?" I insisted. After all, as many years as I have kept house, I'd still have to ask what to do if I stepped into a huge army barracks to take charge.

"You'll be in complete charge of six stockrooms. The girls will tell you what to do."

"Well," I said, "I hope I have more to do than just to go to each one with supplies, then crawl under the counter and sleep."

"It's because you have always found something to do that you are C-Lead. It is because Dolly found a place to sleep that she is out." That meant that I was to have Dolly's stock rooms. Then he laughed. Really laughed, as though he thought it funny. "You'll have your hands full," he said, "but it's your job, not mine."

Jimmie, B-Lead from the next section came sauntering along the aisle. He looked from Albert to me and drawled, "Ello darlin'."

"Mable is my problem child just now," Albert informed him.

I could feel my face turn red, clear down to my throat.

"A mighty sweet problem child," he bantered in his soft southern accent. "Listen," I managed, "I've been kidded by experts."

Albert threatened to move me to the south end of the building where it was really noisy, so I couldn't bother him with questions. "She'll have to solve her own problems then." We all laughed at that, but I took the hint (if you would call it that). Sink or swim, I wouldn't ask anything of him.

As I hurried over to R.P.6A, which is to be my "home," I remembered something I had heard when I was still in school: "It isn't *what* you know, it's *who* you know that counts." Guess

I'm getting off to a good start. I've only been here six months and here I am hob-nobbing with two of the B-Leads. In fact, I'm a lead lady myself. Only a C, to be sure, but my foot's on the first rung of the ladder. I shall deliberately set out to cultivate the right people.

*July 15, 1943*

When Abert said I had charge of six stockrooms, I thought, "Boy, here's where I get them right on the beam," but I didn't reckon with the human element. Three shifts working means eighteen women. Eighteen different types of women. No fooling. Just on my own shift I have Jane: Catholic, perhaps sixty years old, never been married, very straight-laced, jealous, unforgiving. Has been here a month longer than I have (should have been lead). Huh!

Virginia: Widow, very sweet, kind person, scientist, one married daughter, had millinery shop before the war. Perhaps forty years old.

Louise: Tall, slender, white-haired, about fifty years old, very intelligent, political-minded, brings newspapers to read each day.

Helen: twenty-five years old, serious minded, ambitious, dark hair and snappy brown eyes. Speaks quickly, decisively. Thinks she should have better job. Probably will.

Mary Ann: Happy-go-lucky blond, husband overseas, no ambition, working to pass the time. Ignores me completely. Probably twenty two years old.

Louella: Red hair, turning white, small, thin, very cooperative, slow, always behind in her work.

And I'm a C-Lead. Some fun. No wonder Albert laughed.

We have been invoicing all parts, new and old, and putting the total amount of pieces on the bin card. Each time anyone takes out one or more pieces she has to subtract from the total and carry the balance. Then she has to sign her initials.

It is now my job to pick up these bin cards when they are full, check them for errors and hand them to my B-Lead. It didn't take long to find out that most everyone makes mistakes, sooner or

later. Nothing was said about them, we merely try to have them correct. Some of the girls certainly do resent my picking them up. You'd think it was my own private idea for the express purpose of annoying them. A couple of the girls even remove them before they are quite full, and either destroy them or hand them to Albert themselves.

"This substracting each part is a lot of hooey," I complained to Albert. "It takes time while production is waiting to be served."

Albert patted me on the shoulder. "Now don't you worry about that, Mable," he said, "it'll only last until some one thinks up another idea."

*July 16, 1943*

I was really surprised when I bumped into Marguerite in the cafeteria this morning. Since her son joined the Coast Guard, she has been terribly upset. Having known her for thirty years, I tried to straighten her out. "I, too, have a son who will soon be called," I said. "But we'll never bring them back by crying. You'd better get in and pitch, and help win this war."

She stopped crying and stared at me. I thought for a moment she was going to throw something at me.

"What do you mean?" she sobbed.

"I mean there is a job for you at the plant."

"Oh," she said, "Harry wouldn't let me go to work in a factory."

"Of course not," I told her, "You'll have to condition him first, as I did with my husband. First tell him you wouldn't go to work at the plant like Fausteen and Mable did."

She looked astonished. "I don't follow you," she said.

"Well," I answered, "that should give him the idea that some respectable women who don't have to work are there. Then you can follow up from time to time with what good work we are doing, how badly we are needed, how many men are going into the service, and so forth."

"I don't know," she hesitated, wiping the tears from her eyes, "I might try it. I really would like to help."

"No harm in trying; then if he doesn't decide you should go in a week or so, just go anyhow. When you're in, tell him you couldn't help it, you just had to get in and push."

Of course, it's one thing to give advice and quite another to have some one take it, so I was surprised to see her in line at lunch (4.30 A.M.) this morning. Her married daughter, Elaine, was with her.

They gave her a job "Expediting."

"Sounds important," I said.

"Every job here is important," she informed me, "Elaine is working on the wing section."

Elaine gulped down a bite of doughnut and grabbed her coffee cup. "I'm the original Rosie the riveter," she said.

We only have thirty minutes lunch period, so we had to talk fast.

"What is expediting?" I wanted to know.

"Well, you got me there," Marguerite said, "What I'm actually doing is counting and wrapping small packages."

As long as they don't change one of our lunch periods we will meet each day in the cafeteria. Whoever gets there first will stand in line for all of us. It will be a little more fun than eating in my stockroom alone.

*July 17, 1943*

One of the problems, or perhaps I should say one of the adjustments we are going to have to face when this war is over, is the equality of races. Where we have lived, we have had no contact with the colored race, and consequently it shocked me when at rest period today a six foot, husky, black Negro stopped in front of a demure, timid little blond as she was lighting her cigarette. He didn't ask for a light, simply bent over and accepted one as she was lighting her own. As he ambled on down the aisle with two white men, she looked at our astonished faces and explained, "He works in my position."

More and more colored people, both men and women, are coming into the plant. They are working side by side with the



whites, and who is to say they are not doing their share in winning the war.

We have a colored team working on the frame section. One is a middle-aged woman, quite dark, with small shoulders and huge hips. She always bends forward as she works, and one can't help thinking of a little boy with a sling shot. The other is rather young and very pretty, with a slender boyish figure. They build their assemblies perfect in thirty-five minutes, which means that every forty minutes we issue them another group. We keep their jobs pulled ahead so they don't have to wait.

One day, the young girl didn't show up. The older woman had to work with a white girl. They were slow getting their assemblies finished, so I kidded the colored woman about it.

"Oh, these slow white trash," she said. "They're just plain lazy." That should hold me for a while.

*July 18, 1943*

There is a sign about two feet wide and three feet high in the office. I noticed it first this morning when I went for supplies. At the top is a victory pledge, leaving space for several hundred signatures. I read it and signed it, then a girl handed me a card with the same victory pledge on it. It is signed and in my purse with my identification card. It reads:

"Realizing my importance as a Victory worker to my country and it's cause, I solemnly pledge that to the utmost of my ability I will: Allow nothing to keep me from my job. Make the fullest productive use of time, tools, material. Use my ingenuity to develop shortcuts speeding vital output. Guard my own health and safety and that of my fellow workers. Co-operate with our Employee-Management war production drive committee to aid my department and my plant in producing on time and in plenty the weapons of Victory."

*July 19, 1943*

We had a much-needed Lead conference today. Albert called it in a small room next to the dispensary. He sat at the head of the table, looking very much like a judge. We C-Leads, four men

and eight women, pushed around the table on benches. Another B-Lead and a couple of fellows I didn't know were there.

Cigarettes were passed around, and the room took on a hazy hue. That was just what I needed, being a non-smoker myself. At least it was quiet, the room being sound-proof.

We all told our names, and then Albert said, "I think it might clear up a question that everyone is asking if we would all tell what job we had before the war." As we started around the room we soon got the significance of his idea. Who were these leads who were running this huge factory? What were their qualifications?

Abert had been a beer salesman. That accounted for his neat appearance, his straightforward and impressive speech, his knack of handling people. Perhaps some of the other leads could be analyzed the same way, but suffice it to say that they were doing good work—according to the way the line kept moving.

They represented most every type of business you could think of—except an aircraft factory. They were former ranchers, hotelmen, real estate salesmen, grocers, shoemen, beauty parlor operators, milliners, teachers, and housewives.

All the training they had was either given them in a few days at the factory school, or picked up during the time they had worked here. Most of them had worked in the plant more than a year. I managed to get by without telling them how long I had been there.

Most of the complaints were about shortages. How and why they occurred. Inspections was another topic which shocked us. We all thought we could do better at inspecting parts. Too many errors were slipping through. The parts that are made here as well as those we get from the feeder-plants are all carefully examined by inspectors. They must be right before they come into the stockrooms. However, now and then, we do catch errors. Those we send to salvage. We have forty acres of parts. (Good parts, not salvage.)

I also found that women Leads have more worker-trouble than men Leads. It seems women would rather work under men.



*July 22, 1943*

There is an old saying that one half the world never knows what the other half is doing. That is true in regard to a C-Lead. I can understand now why I never saw Dolly after she stopped the once to ask me if I needed anything. R.P.6A needs no help. All three shifts are here every day. Nothing gets behind. R.P.6C needs a great deal of help from a C-Lead. They have more stock and serve a larger production line. R.P.6B also needs help, so there you are.

I spend most of my time in those two stockrooms, although I still do my bookwork back in 6A where my bench remains. I am doing whatever needs to be done and ignoring the fact that most of the girls resent me.

I think Jane is going to cause me the most trouble. She told me not to come into her stockroom this morning. I went in, of course, because I have my checking to do, regardless.

"I'm going right to the office and report you to the Supervisor," she announced and stalked off toward the office. There was so much noise, she didn't know I was right behind her. She marched stiffly up to an imposing-looking man at the supervisor's desk, and then she saw me. "You can't come too," she said. I winked at the fellow behind the desk as she turned to him. "Mable insists on coming into my stockroom," she told him "and I have told her to stay out. I've been here longer than she has and I'm not going to take orders from her."

"Jane," I interrupted, "I don't believe you know Mr. Smith," then very formally I said, "Jane, may I present Mr. Smith? He isn't the supervisor, you know, he is from Spares."

Jane turned and fled back to her stockroom.

"That was very catty of me," I told Mr. Smith, "and I'll pay for it, don't you forget it! But I'm getting so fed up trying to smooth the feathers on some of these old hens."

He laughed. "That ought to hold her for a while," he said.

But of course I did wrong. She'll really have it in for me now. The worst part of it is, we were so friendly before I was made Lead. I did like her very much, and I thought she liked me.

*July 25, 1943*

When I arrived this morning (last night), I caught the swing-shift crew hiding a bomber control assembly.

"What goes on here?" I asked.

One of the girls said, "Just leave it there; we'll finish it tomorrow."

Most assemblies, especially the larger ones are carried on from one shift to another. That is, one shift starts where the other leaves off. When anything goes wrong, one shift always blames the other. Evidently swing shift didn't like the looks of yesterday's work, so they started their own. Graveyard isn't working on that assembly so days will get their own work to finish. Wonder if they'll recognize it.

*July 25, 1943*

Albert marched up to the counter this morning escorting a very charming little lady who only reached to his shoulder.

"Mable," he said, "This is Mrs. Lisbon, I'm going to leave her with you a few days. Show her the ropes."

Her few gray hairs gave her a touch of dignity which her laughing gray eyes belied. "Just call me Libby," she said. "All my friends do."

Working with her is going to be a joy. She has no reason to resent me, no axe to grind. She hasn't been here longer than I have, and she doesn't know a thing about stockroom procedure. There is a fly in the ointment, however; she won't be working under me unless they lay off some one or transfer somebody. My stockrooms are competently manned.

*July 27, 1943*

Larry came into the stockroom as usual this morning, checking up on small assemblies. He is the Beau Brummel of the plant. The smooth type. Not tall, dark, and handsome, but rather blondish, with wavy hair that makes the girls want to run their fingers through it (so they say). He has direct blue eyes that look straight

at you, and his clothes are full of color. Yellow sweaters and lavender slacks (blue, of course), red sweaters and tan slacks.

Like all Leads on production, it is his business to see that the assemblies are built ahead so the line will never have to be held up. He came in to see what the other two shifts had built.

His ready smile left his face, and pure unadulterated fury filled his eyes. In a bin directly in front of him were the metal frames used under the bomber doors. He grabbed one in each hand and turned to me. "Who the hell put round head rivets in these?" he exploded, "Any stupid idiot would know a door couldn't close unless the rivets were flush."

All the swear-words I have ever heard and a few besides filled the air as he stamped out of the stockroom. I yanked out all the assemblies and piled them on the counter. About half of them were wrong. Those I took out and put on a bench for rework. They had been built on "Daze," and stamped O.K. with a lead-man's stamp as well as with the inspector's stamp.

Larry himself expertly drilled out the round heads and replaced them with flush rivets, all the while painting the air blue with what he thought of everyone who doesn't work on his shift. Larry is quite a guy.

*August 3, 1943*

Victory gardens are certainly flourishing now. Wherever there is a vacant lot, or part of one, it has been planted with vegetables. Here and there you see tomato vines growing on a trellis where flowers used to twine, carrots making a lacy border for the walks. Green onions springing up resemble Chinese lilies.

What with the Army-Navy, Lend-Lease, and so forth causing a food shortage, we are very grateful to live where we can raise our food. My husband is president of the Exchange Club, and they have obtained a plot of ground one block long and half a block wide, which they have planted with carrots, turnips, and tomatoes. The members of the Club take turns weeding and cultivating it. The children of the neighborhood also delight in pulling weeds. The products are being donated to the various hospitals.

*August 12, 1943*

There is really an alarming shortage of housing here. So many families are continually coming to the coast to work in the aircraft factories and the shipyards. Trailer parks are springing up everywhere, but even they can only take care of a small percentage of the people. Those who have a down payment on a home are fortunate, as the monthly payments would only equal rent. In the end they will have something to sell if they return east.

Louella, In R.P. 4G, said her landlady asked her to share her daughter's room and leave her own vacant for another person. "You work graveyard," she said, "and my daughter works days."

Louella, a lovely little person, her red hair turning white, said she would think it over. But to me she said, "I just can't do it. The girl is not clean enough. She only bathes occasionally and I was taught at least certain parts of the body should be washed daily."

*September 3, 1943*

Tomorrow is Marguerite's birthday. What can we do to celebrate? Have lunch together at four thirty A.M. in the cafeteria? But we do that every day. I ask myself, why celebrate? But I know why. It is because we have woven a thread of color through our lives that shines out twice a year, on her birthday and on mine. A color that is bright with happy memories. Memories of her babies and mine growing through adolescence. We can no more break the thread than we can end our own journey. This war is just one more obstacle that we are going to hurdle. It looks dark and is discouraging. Far from won.

But we have faith that God is on our side; surely it will end soon. So many of our young boys are being slaughtered—so many of the enemy boys. Innocent youth, with a desire only to live, love and be happy.

Sometimes I think we should send all the politicians, and money-grabbers into the first battle. Perhaps a few of our hysterical newspaper men and commentators. It seems to be greed for money or power or both that causes most of the unhappiness in the world.

Elaine just dashed up to the counter. "They're having a surprise party for mother in her department," she announced. "Four-thirty—you and I are invited. We'll have to hurry, but who cares?"

A birthday party in thirty minutes. I would never have thought of it.

*September 4, 1943*

Marguerite had quite a party this morning. All in thirty minutes. A huge table was made by quickly pulling several counters together. She was really surprised, and more so when she saw Elaine and me rush in. Tears filled our eyes as we realized how quickly we had to snatch the few pleasures we could, for tomorrow we may be bombed. We are living from day to day.

We had a covered-dish luncheon, each bringing a dish of food from where she had hidden it, and we all were seated, including the Leads and the Supervisor. Everyone gave her a lovely handkerchief. I expect she will put them away and keep them to dream over. I had to be different. I gave her a large bar of bath soap on a pink silk cord. It was meant for a joke, of course, but Marguerite said, "It's a pretty good joke, when soap is so scarce and hard to find." I wonder where we will be a year from now, or if we will be.

*September 12, 1943*

We had a baby shower for Larry today at lunch period. He was certainly flustered. His questioning blue eyes searched our faces for an explanation. I don't know where he is from, but he surely had never heard of a baby shower. To be truthful, that's the first time I ever heard of giving a baby shower for a man. Everyone got quite a kick out of it. A few months ago he married one of the girls from the department. That was really why they gave the shower.

We made him unwrap all the baby things. "What's this for?" he kept asking. "You'll find out," we answered.

There were a lot of new fangled gadgets: paper diapers, elec-



tric bottle warmers, nighties with strings in the sleeves and bottom.

He took it good-naturedly, laughing at everything he opened. Suddenly he stopped laughing. "Say," he thundered, "how'm I going to get these things out of the plant?"

He got all kinds of advice about smuggling them out one at a time as we had smuggled them in. He shook his blond head doubtfully.

We aren't allowed to bring anything into the plant, but we're just like a bunch of kids—we always want to do the things we're not supposed to. It's fairly easy to smuggle small packages under our coat. The cops at the gate have so many hundreds swarming through at the same time that it's impossible to watch them all.

Larry finally phoned his wife, and she met him at the tunnel with their car. Larry had been riding the bus.

*September 13, 1943*

Everyone has been trying to find out how Larry got his packages out. He won't tell. I suppose some understanding Supervisor O.K.'ed them for him. If we want to bring something in for another person, we check it at the gate and pick it up as we go out. However most people exchange things at their cars in the parking lot.

*September 16, 1943*

I don't know how we are going to handle Louise, the girl in R.P.6C. She is a very intelligent woman who reads a great deal and understands what she reads. She can discuss 'most any subject at length, but she has made up her mind that she is here to serve production and that's what she expects to do. That and nothing else.

She puts her stock away, and hands it out again when production presents an issuance card for it. She says the Leads are ridiculously simple minded, and she simply will not follow any suggestion.

We have orders from higher up to inventory all stock. That

seems like a legitimate request. Any storekeeper should know what stock he has on hand. I understand now why Albert said 6A was a model stockroom. All three shifts do keep a perpetual inventory as we were instructed to do. We never got behind.

As C-Lead I am expected to pass orders on to each stockroom clerk. One of the first things I learned on this job was that you can't tell any one of them anything. They have been here longer than I have, so they naturally know more. They won't acknowledge that things keep changing almost daily. So when I get an order to change something we have been doing, I have learned to laugh and say, "Well, papa has a new idea for us." Sometimes it works.

I have pitched in right from the start to help put stock away wherever I was needed, so have tried to help Louise whenever I could. I see she resents it, but she would never get through without help. We are now supposed to tape things in convenient bundles according to how many are pulled at a time. No more in twenties as we have been doing. It saves time in pulling the jobs and also at inventory. Louise gets very put out because the other shifts tape what they take in. She doesn't want them taped.

Today I started in on heavy stiffeners. "R.P.6C hasn't been completely inventoried," I mentioned, "so I better hurry and help you." I didn't say it hadn't been inventoried at all, which was the truth. She calmly turned her back on me and started pulling out bin boxes, dusting them, and pushing them back in again. She was working hard so there'd be no time to count stock.

After a few killing glances, she said, "I don't see how they expect me to find time for inventory."

"Oh," I laughed, "I got orders to help you."

She stooped to pick up the evening paper she had brought in with her, and which she hadn't been able to read because I was there. As she straightened up to put it on the counter she glanced at the head lines. Just then Walter, a new Lead, stopped at the counter. It couldn't have been timed better.

He told her straight from the shoulder that he had a complaint that she was reading the papers on company time, instead of taking



care of the stock. "Hereafter," he said, "No more reading during working hours. Let's get this inventory finished."

Of course I got blamed for "tattling."

*September 18, 1943*

Albert is a real diplomat. He stopped me in the aisle this morning and said, "Mable, your protégée (meaning Libby) has taken in a lot of parts. Would you mind helping her book them up?" Of course, he knew that I knew he meant, "Get the hell over there and give her a hand." I am trying the same method with my girls, but of course it isn't the same. When I say "Albert wants us to do so and so," they usually act as though they're not going to do it, but they always do it if they think he said so.

I'm glad Louise is here today. I had quite a day yesterday with her being absent. I had an idea she had quit. I ran 6C by myself. It really is a busy stockroom, although I probably can't pull an assembly as fast as Louise can. She has been in the one stockroom about a year, while I am just in and out.

An old fellow coming in on day shift stuck his head around the bin box and said, "Where's Louise?"

I told him she was absent, and he said, "Where is your newspaper? Why aren't you reading the news?"

"Should I be?" I asked.

"Well," he answered, "Louise always tells me all about the news when I come in. It saves me reading it."

*September 22, 1943*

To Stockroom B-Leads—Third shift.

Subject: Stockroom inventory. (Passed on to me.)

Stockroom inventory: It is now the responsibility of the third shift to maintain the stock inventory.

It will be the responsibility of each stockroom girl to maintain a perpetual inventory at all times.

Effective at once, determine how long it will take for each stock girl to inventory her R.P. (taking into consideration the time required in basic stockroom functions), and see that all spare

time is spent in maintaining the stockroom inventory.

It will be necessary to keep a constant check on the progress of the inventory, checking the progress against the expected results.

No stockroom girl is excused from this function, and any inactivity (where inventory is not complete) will be questioned.

Signed by Ass't Day Supervisor and third shift supervisor.

*September 24, 1943*

I've been so busy with the different stockrooms that I haven't had time to get back to Louise other than to leave her a copy of the office request about the inventory. I suppose she thinks it was written especially for her, and maybe it was at that.

A girl from the Supervisor's office heard her tell the Supervisor yesterday that she was going to quit because Walter had insulted her. I don't know what impression she gave the Supervisor, but it didn't sound so good at second hand. Walter is a straightforward young man with a round boyish face and a pleasing smile. He speaks lovingly of his wife and baby. He would be the last person I would expect to hear insult a lady. Louise is thin, tall, and nearly fifty. She has a very cutting tongue.

Virginia, in R.P.6B and I both heard the conversation a few days ago when Walter told her how she would have to quit reading on company time. I suppose that was what insulted her. Being me, I had to put in my two-bits worth, so I marched up to the office and told the Supervisor what I thought of Walter. "You'll look a long while before you find a more gentlemanly Lead," I informed him, "or a more conscientious one."

*September 26, 1943*

Shortages are a real problem. There is the general impression that the Leads do no work. If it were not for Bill, who is still my ideal for a Lead, production would stop a great many times. He claims he has built ten ships without any parts. You see, if we run out of forty inch segments, he takes a forty two inch one of the same material and cuts it off. If he runs out of a very long one he

takes two small ones and splices them. If a certain type skin is short, he makes another one to fit. Of course that plays havoc with our bin count, if we don't keep a constant watch.

*September 30, 1943*

To all employees

Subject: "E" Award ceremony

On Thursday, September 30, the Army-Navy "E" Ceremony will be held from 3:15 to 3:45 P. M. on the flight ramp. All employees on all shifts are cordially invited to attend, and will proceed as follows:

1. First shift employees will clock out at 3:05, (can you visualize several hundred employees all punching a time clock at five minutes past three?) proceed to the flight ramp and leave the plant at the conclusion of the ceremony.

2. Second shift employees will be admitted to the plant prior to 3:15 P.M. and will proceed directly to the flight ramp. At the termination of the ceremony, they will go to their departments, clock in, and begin work.

3. Third shift employees are requested to enter the plant through the south tunnel, proceed directly to the flight ramp, and leave the plant at the conclusion of the ceremony.

Although first shift employees will clock out early and second shift will clock in late so that they may attend the ceremony, such employees will suffer no loss of pay.

For the day of the ceremony, all second shift plant-bound busses will be scheduled 15 minutes early. Similarly, all home-bound busses for the first shift will be delayed fifteen minutes.

It is hoped that all personnel will attend the ceremony since the "E" award represents personal achievement by every man and woman of this plant.

*Signed* PLANT MANAGER

This is quite an honor, but I can't imagine many "graveyarders" breaking up their day to make the trip. Makes me weary to think about it.

*Sunday, October 10, 1943*

New dim-out regulations taken from the *Independent*:

"Headquarters Western Defense Command.

"Guide to New Dim-out Regulations. Proclamation No. 19 prepared by Office of Civilian Defense.

"The former area of restricted lighting is now divided into three zones with graduated requirements.

"Zone A. A strip adjacent to the ocean approximately fifteen miles wide, with the exception of limited areas near San Francisco, Los Angeles, Columbia River, and several coastal bays where this zone extends inland to about thirty miles.

"Zone B. Only those parts of zone A which are visible to the sea, but in no case more than ten miles from sea.

"Zone C. All the former area of restricted lighting located inland from zone A.

"A comparison of old and new regulations. Zone A.

"Interior lights. Proclamation No. 12: All shielded to horizontal and from sea where visible to the sea. Proclamation No. 19: Only those lights within six feet from window require shielding (in residences, can be close to window if shielded by lamp shade). All skylights to be shielded from direct rays from light sources.

"Zone B. Same as for zone A but also shielded from sea where visible to sea.

"Zone C. No restrictions.

"Exterior lights No. 12: All shielded to horizontal.

No. 19: Zone A. All shielded to horizontal. Zone B. All shielded to horizontal and from sea when visible to sea. Zone C. All light over one hundred watt size (or equivalent in light intensity) to be shielded to horizontal. One hundred watts or under are unrestricted.

"Illumination on outdoor areas. No. 12: Limited to not more than one foot-candle. No. 19: Zone A. Limited to not more than one foot-candle. Zone B. Limited to not more than one foot-candle. Zone C. Now more than five foot-candles.

"Outdoor Advertising signs and display lighting. No. 12: Prohibited. No. 19: Zone A. Prohibited. Zone B. Prohibited. Zone C. Permitted unshielded up to one hundred watts (or equivalent light intensity). Permitted with shielding to horizontal up to a limit of five foot-candles on surface.

"Street lights: Shielded in all instances.

Traffic Signals: No. 12—Shielded. No. 19—Unshielded.

Auto Headlights: No. 12: Restricted to two hundred fifty

candle-power in areas visible to sea. No. 19: Zone A. Unrestricted. Zone B. Restricted to low or depressed beam of regular headlights in areas visible to the sea. Zone C. Unrestricted.

"Recreation and sports lighting. No. 12: Limited to one foot-candle. No. 19: Zone A. Permitted to amount necessary when shielded horizontal. Zone B. Prohibited if within three miles of the sea. Permitted same as zone A if more than three miles from sea and shielded from sea. Zone C. Same as zone A.

"Effective Hours: No. 12 Sunset to sunrise. No. 19 during winter months from October 1 to April 30 effective hours are from one half hour after official sunset to one half hour before official sunrise. During summer months from May 1 to September 30 effective hours are from one hour after sunset to one hour before sunrise."

This is very dry reading, but in after years it will remind us of the weird, ghostly streets, the phantom headlights, the mad scramble to find black material to cover our windows and to some of us, the one blackout room where we spent our evenings.

Proclamation No. 19 is encouraging, but I wonder, is it wise?

*October 18, 1943*

To: All employees of the department.

From: Supervisor.

Subject: Plant tour on birthday.

In order that employees not in groups which enable them to move about the plant, may get a better idea of the manufacture of the parts they handle, the writer will adopt the policy of personally conducting each employee through the fabricating and assembly department on his or her birthday.

Please advise your Leadman of any approaching birthday so that we may schedule this tour for you.

Signed Ass't Supervisor Parts Supply.

*October 20, 1943*

According to rumor we are experiencing a double romance. Life here at the plant would be unbearably dull if we let our minds dwell on the horrors of war, the hunger of people, and the



darned old rationing. Points for meat, points for canned food, and points for shoes. No gasoline, no butter, no soap.

So who can blame us if we add a bit of glamour to a few rumors of romance? Who can say it is wicked if we add a touch of our imagination to each item before we pass it on to see it embroidered by another?

Now we are having a double romance. A foursome. The two couples come in and out of the plant together. (Probably a share-the-ride group.) They lunch together at the cafeteria. That much is true. But to get on with the rumors. They are all four married but not to each other. One has a divorce in process (not verified). One couple is a supervisor from another building and a girl on production. He is a chunky fellow, about fifty, with a shiny head, not the least bit romantic-looking. She is probably twenty-five, and average in slacks. Working on production, of course, what hair she has is covered with a red bandana. Now make a romance out of that if you can.

The other couple I hear talking in the aisle as I go back and forth to the office. He was a Lead, who at present time is being pushed back and forth from Spares to Shortages and back to Spares. She is a round-faced, plump girl from the office. She wears her blond hair cut short like a man's.

I speak of the office because that's where the desks are and where our Supervisor is. It is really just a big open section in the center of the building with about twenty desks. I don't know who occupies them. Also there are several cabinets where blueprints, shop orders, and records of various types are kept, and a huge black board, about twenty feet high, where all shortages are listed, hangs across a wall. I really don't see what good it does. But to get back to the rumors. Those are just the newest ones. We hear all kinds.

There are the ones about sending all young men to training or directly into service without training. There will only be old men and women to do war work.

By the time that dies down they are going to do away with all women Leads. Men are the only ones capable of directing pro-



duction. Each rumor has a tiny germ of authenticity when the first of the fifty thousand workers hears it. The only surprising thing is that it doesn't turn out worse than it does.

*November 1, 1943*

Everyone has been poking fun at Helen because she comes in late so often. R.P.6E is quite a distance from the office, so no one sees her who might call her on it. However, if we clock in one minute late, we are docked fifteen minutes. If we come in one minute past fifteen minutes, they take a half hour off our pay check.

She and her husband have been dashing in quite frequently a few minutes after the whistle blows.

The other day I jokingly told her I would start phoning her at eleven o'clock each night, before I left home.

She looked at me very seriously for a moment. "No," she said, "It would be too much trouble for you."

I was laughing, of course, but I assured her it wouldn't, and it's working out fine. I live twice the distance from the plant that she does, so before my driver arrives, I phone her, and she has time to dress and get to the plant on time.

They don't have an alarm clock and I do. You can't buy one for love or money. Helen deserves a better job if anyone does. You couldn't blame her if she resented my being Lead, yet she shows it very little. She has been here six months longer than I have, and works continually from the time she starts until the last whistle blows. While some girls are passing the time of day, she is counting her stock and fixing her bin boxes. Not only that, but she learns a great deal about parts and procedure from her husband. She is very serious about getting ahead.

She speaks rather abruptly and emphatically. If she says it, it is so, and that's that. Perhaps that's her handicap. In handling people, I have learned, you have to use a lot of blarney and never, never be critical of the other fellow. They just won't like you if you do. I always say, "You can catch more flies with honey than you can with vinegar."

*November 20, 1943*

The Dime-a-Week club is growing rapidly as we become accustomed to having the dime in our pocket. Monitors pass around a paper carton (sealed) each week and we all put in one or more dimes.

A dime doesn't seem like much, but ten of them make a dollar.

One of the girls received a letter from her husband in which he said that each enlisted man aboard ship was given a carton of cigarettes with gift cards inserted at the plant. That makes us feel good when we hear of someone we know actually getting the package. Cards which are inclosed here at the plant have been returned to the Armed Services Benefit Fund from England, North Africa, Italy, Iceland, Australia, the Solomons, India, and Alaska.

In many of these war theaters, cigarettes are next to impossible to buy, and in many places they are strictly rationed.

More than a thousand dollars have already been put in a special Christmas fund for candy and cigarettes for the U. S. Naval hospitals.

*November 23, 1943*

According to production schedules, the one-thousandth B-17 will be produced sometime in December, and it is planned to give the flying fortress to the Army Air Force as a Christmas present. Posters and a huge chart were hung yesterday in buildings twelve and thirteen. Those who work on the Fortress, as well as others in the plant, are buying extra war bonds apart from the regular payroll savings deductions.

The two largest purchasers to date each bought four thousand dollars worth. The purchase price of a bomber is three hundred thousand dollars. There is a log book in the office which will be hung in the plane. We are all signing our name and writing a few words for the boys to read. I have written:

TO THE 1000TH B-17  
Here's to you. O Fortress fair,  
O mighty warrior of the air,  
Here's to you and may God please  
To guide you home again "at ease."

*November 24, 1943*

Yesterday I went to town from the plant. I'm sure I could have made as good time as the bus if I had walked. Then about half way, we had a peculiar accident. The bus stopped to pick up three people. As they pushed their way in, another woman tried to get off. She caught her heel and fell head first off the bus. We all had to give our name and address before we could go on.

The bus situation is getting worse all the time. Car drivers are asked to pick up workers who are wearing the plant badge. The company which formerly operated over thirty buses to the plant now has only twenty-five, because of the shortage of repair parts and mechanics to install replacement parts that are available. Many buses are making two trips. I'm very thankful that I have a driver to pick me up.

*Christmas, 1943*

On an impulse I hurried up to the Supervisor's desk at 3:10 this morning. "Did you ever notice how many mornings I get here early?" I asked.

"Yes," he said, "and I have noticed that you usually go to work when you arrive, instead of waiting for the whistle. What's the idea?"

I didn't tell him I had to go to work or to sleep, but twelve o'clock midnight is a poor time to sit around. Rather, I said, "I'm trying to set a good example."

He looked at me suspiciously. "You're not going to ask for the rest of the morning off?" he accused.

That was my cue. "Oh no," I laughed, "I'm only going to ask for the next fifteen minutes off."

"Granted!" he said.

Ever since I arrived at 11:30 it had been going over and over in my mind, how we could possibly have a Christmas party in thirty minutes. As I flew down the aisle to get things ready I thought I heard "Mable!" above the noise of the machines. I stopped and looked around. The girl from R.P.43 caught up with me. "They're putting a moving picture screen right where you planned the tables," she shouted.

"I rushed over to the men. "Must we have a picture right here?" I asked, "we are planning a big Christmas party."

The two men proceeded to set up the machine. "We're showing a picture because it's Christmas, and we want to entertain you," the taller one said. "That's all we know about it."

"Wait just a minute," I snapped, with all the authority I could manage. "We'll have to find another place for you; our table is going to be there."

The precious minutes were ticking off as I rushed on down the aisle looking for a space big enough for a group to see the picture. I was glad I had talked with the Supervisor. At first I had considered ignoring him, thinking I probably wouldn't be noticed as my job keeps me running back and forth. Now I had a feeling of security. There are very few vacant spaces in the building, but I found one that I thought would do. I rushed back to bluff it out with the men. I don't know who they thought I was, but they were packing up their equipment.

"You can move it down here," I pointed, "about a hundred feet. Come back after the picture and we'll save you some goodies."

I rushed over to Bill and Lew. "For the love of Mike," I shouted, "can you help me clear this table so we can push it up to the other one. We want one long table."

"For the love of Mable," Bill answered, "we will."

Lew said, "You want this other one over here?"

"Sure, why not?" I laughed. "But make it snappy."

In less time than it takes to tell, we had a table fifty feet long, covered with white paper (swiped from the upholstery department); Helen brought some poinsettias for decoration, and we had

poinsettia paper napkins left over from the swing shift party. The food was lined up in three stockrooms, so I had most of it on the table before the whistle blew. We pooled our ration points, and six girls baked the meat loaves. This is the darkest Christmas in history, I'm sure. No sign of the war being over. No sign even of eventual victory. Just work, hope, and pray.

When the whistle blew three shorts and a long, the noise stopped, and men and women were drawn as if by a magnet to the table—each carrying something to sit on in one hand and a thermos bottle in the other.

As I watched them, I thought, "This is just one department on one shift. For a moment I paused to thank God for the health, the energy, and the privilege of doing my share along with all these fine people.

*January 8, 1944*

Just a year since I came into the plant. When will the war end? Little did I think a year ago, when the instructor took that first piece of metal from my hands and threw it in the trash box, that I would be here a whole year. It seems but yesterday when he looked at me and snapped, "Which is your basic side?"—and I didn't know I had a basic side.

I can still recall the terrified shivers I had when he said, "You'll never see another rivet gun, I hope."

Well, I've seen hundreds of them this past year. Rivet guns and bucking bars, in the hands of youth and in the hands of age. Strong hands, dependable hands, determined hands.

I've learned that there is a place for all types of hands in the fight for liberty. Every day ushers in new workers. Some big, husky, and ready to tackle the world. Others, slight, timid, with the same frightened look I must have had a year ago.

We have been hearing the rumor that Graveyard is ending. That is good news. It can mean one of two things. Either we are getting enough trained, skilled workers and tools to do the job on two shifts, or the end is in sight and we will taper off on production.



*January 12, 1944*

The moving picture machine started again last night and we all grabbed a box or stool and our lunch and rushed over to enjoy the picture as we ate.

We were shown another Army release. We see the actual fighting. It is horrible. I suppose the psychology of showing them is to make us work harder and buy more bonds.

Before the program is over, they usually lighten it with a comedy. It sounds strange to hear the laughter instead of the usual roar of machines.

*January 28, 1944*

Communique from the office.

**"TO ALL THIRD SHIFT EMPLOYEES.**

Because of a remarkable increase in efficiency demonstrated by the personnel of the B-17G Project, it is possible to maintain production requirements at this time on a two-shift basis without overloading any department or operation.

If first and second shift personnel loads can be balanced, coordination problems will be considerably lessened, and the overall efficiency of the project greatly improved.

In order to accomplish this it is desirable, insofar as possible, to transfer all third shift employees to the second shift. It is appreciated that such a move may inconvenience some employees and may require some sacrifice on their part. However, B-17G workers have repeatedly demonstrated their sincere desire to further the war effort and will recognize, I am sure, that this proposed move is just one more step toward the greater production of Fortresses and an early Victory.

Your fine cooperation, past and anticipated, is greatly appreciated.

*Signed:* SUPERINTENDENT B17G PROJECT.

There is no misunderstanding that communique. Insofar as possible, we are all going on Swing shift. It will mean adjustments for the young people. They will have to do their partying after midnight. But the real hardship will be on the women who have small children. Graveyard has given the father the opportunity to be with the children when the mother was working.



To me it will mean that I will see my husband only from midnight to 8 A.M. As tired as I am when I get home, that really means that I won't see him at all. How long, O Lord, how long?

*February 4, 1944*

The lay-off of graveyard is completed. Tomorrow night is our last night. No one knows the score as yet. As far as we can determine, no one is being laid off. Just transferred to days or swing. Most of our production is going on swing. I am to be transferred to days, and so will lose sight of 'most everyone I have met and enjoyed.

The last six months have been a bit trying, a matching of wits, a case of the survival of the fittest; yet, we are all pretty well in the swing now—everyone, of course, but Jane.

Since Louise quit, and Bell and Flo are working in 6D, we have had harmony there. Helen, Mary Ann, and Louella have cooperated, more or less, since they discovered there was nothing any of us could do about my being a Lead. Virginia, of course, was a darling from the first, and my adopted Libby has brightened the long hours with her cheerful smile and helpful manner ever since she came into the picture.

I will always cherish the many nice things written in my memory book. Among them, a note from my favorite Leadman, Bill.

"First I'll wish you a lot of luck on another shift, as this is next to the last night on Graveyard. Wish you had one of my stockrooms on Swing, as I sure will miss arguing with you. What ever you do on Days, don't let it get your goat. Ha!

If I had the power to carve or paint  
Your future, Dear Friend  
It would be ever bright,  
Unbounded to the end." Bill

Then from Lew: "Here is hoping I find a stockroom Lead on Swing as cooperative as you, Mable. Lot's of luck on Day shift. (You'll need it.) Ha Ha. Lew."

From Libby: "I am sure my work in the department would

not have been successful had it not been for the training you gave me the first few weeks after entering the department. I hope our friendship will not cease by having to be separated by the change of shifts. Libby."

From Virginia: "Mable dear, I feel that it has been a privilege to work with you. I have enjoyed it very much. Hope some day we shall work together again and will see you often. Virginia R.P.6C."

From Bell:

"Here's to Mable from little Bell.

Where we will land no one can tell,  
But our old graveyard is no more;  
They have moved us out and closed the door.  
But we'll build our planes and build them well  
For the boys who are so swell.

The stock girl Bell. 6D"

From Flo: "Remember our date. February 3, 1949. Here's hoping it will not be lunch period or anything but a memory of B-17's. Flo."

(We kept this date and had a fine lunch and visit at Bullock's, Los Angeles.)

From Louella: "May you like your new job on Days and find pleasant companions to work with. Louella."

From Betty (the prettiest girl I ever knew):

"Dearest 'Gerkie,' hope I shall see you often, and I hope your new job will be very-very-O.K. Your candy is wonderful and you are a very swell person. Glad to have known you. Betty."

Nothing, of course, from Jane in R.P.4A. After she returned my carefully chosen Christmas card which said:

"With all the world aflame, and war and hate filling the minds of men, this holy season offers a message of hope that some day the world will return again to tolerance and compassion and that the gentle guiding hand of the PRINCE OF PEACE will lead us all to happiness and security.

May God bless you and keep you safe and may you enjoy a merry Christmas and a New Year bright with the hope of better times to come."

I realized she was determined to hate me to the end, so I have completely ignored her, the same as she has me. I wonder how old she is. The past year has not dealt kindly with her. She looks much older than when I first met her. For that matter, I suppose I look older too. I'm getting a new phase tomorrow morning at seven o'clock. It is not with the same misgiving I had when I accepted C-Lead. I anticipated trouble ahead then. I knew how the girls resented Dolly and I knew they would resent me all the more. However, I am supposed to have a lead job. "They" tell me that my salary will not be cut regardless. Still I have a feeling that Day shift will resent anyone from Graveyard.

*communique from the office.*

TO: ALL PERSONNEL TRANSFERRING TO FIRST OR SECOND SHIFTS.

The last few days have been hectic ones for all of us. I would like to express my thanks and appreciation for the spirit and cooperation you have shown in making the necessary adjustments in your working hours. It is realized that some of you have had to make drastic changes in your home schedules to conform to the change and your sacrifices in this respect are deeply appreciated. It is through such sacrifices that the home front war effort is what it is today, and our efforts here have a direct bearing on how long it will take to win this war overseas. Thank you again.

*Signed* ASS'T SUPERVISOR

That is the final message from Graveyard. It is a "thank you," and a challenge. We must put our best foot forward, our shoulder to the wheel, and get this war over.

*February 6, 1944*

What a surprise I had this morning at seven o'clock. My first day on "Daze." Jimmy took my arm, and said in his broad southern accent, "Come with me!" He guided me down the aisle to a receiving point in the extreme south end of the building. The farther south we went the noisier it got and we stopped at the last R.P.

"Honey child," he shouted, "I stayed over to see that my girls were taken care of."

"Yeh?" I questioned dubiously.

"You won't be a Big Lead, but you will be in charge of two or three stockrooms."

He introduced me to the girls in R.P.9A. "The C-Lead here is on vacation," he announced as he left me to figure out whether I was taking her place temporarily, permanently, or not at all.

The girls in the stockroom soon put me straight on that. I explained to them that I had worked on Graveyard over a year, seven months of which I was C-Lead.

"Well, you've got a lot to learn!" the tall blond girl said sarcastically, and I knew they weren't accepting any Lead from Graveyard.

I'd rather be a janitor and sweep the floors than go through that again.

"I'm here to do whatever is necessary," I said, trying not to shout, and yet be heard, "and of course you will have to tell me what that is."

It didn't take long to find out that what had always been a rumor before was actually the truth. The real work is done on the day shift, and no wonder they call it "Daze." The terrific noise recalls the threat that Albert made the first night I was C-Lead. He said to Jimmy, "I guess I'll have to put Mable at the south end of the building where it is really noisy and she can't ask me when she gets stuck."

Albert has been a fine Lead. I wonder where the shift from Graveyard has put him.

Just outside the stockroom, I spied Velta. She was riveting segments. She waved to me, but it wasn't until rest period that I got to speak to her. All day she stands at one position.

"So this is where you have been," I called to her.

"Been right here all the time," she answered.

With her working a different shift, I hadn't seen her since the night she came to my counter for me to identify her. She is an old friend. Being with her at lunch and rest periods will cheer me up. I haven't heard what happened to Marguerite yet, but it is too far for me to go to the Cafeteria and get back in thirty

minutes. As Swing shift started filtering in, who should come by the counter but Dove. "Why Mable," she exclaimed, "fancy finding you here!"

"I can echo that," I said. "I've been a year on Graveyard."

"I've got you beat," she laughed. "I've been a year and two months on Swing."

She is working on the next aisle, building assemblies for the B-17 and the A-26, but of course I will only see her as she comes in because when she goes to work I quit. Dove is another woman past middle age who doesn't need to work—another woman who is doing her share to win the war. Her folks were among the Donner party that was so nearly wiped out. Her husband's people gave a park to the city years ago. It is now one of the nicest parks in the city.

*February 12, 1944*

We certainly keep busy on this shift. The last two hours of the day are the longest two hours I ever experienced. We were used to working six hours an Graveyard. We work eight hours on Days. We have to rush to pull enough assemblies to keep the department going. Most of the workers have been at the same position long enough to put out a job in record time.

The stock is all strange to me, and sure enough, the two girls in this stockroom are going to let me shift for myself. I can sink or swim as far as they are concerned. I'm too tired to see anything amusing in an aircraft factory on "Daze." The one saving grace is that we use the same records on all shifts.

Pulling an assembly is the same on one shift as it is on the other. There are just so many more of them. Then, more stock comes in from purchased parts, from the feeder plants, and from the fabrication department. It is easy to understand why Graveyard was expected to keep up the inventory. I wonder what will happen to it now.

The noise is terrific. It seems to get louder every day. No one tries to talk. We have to keep stepping or be stepped on.

I cornered Bill and Lew this morning and asked them about



bringing my bench back to R.P.9A. "It's your bench," Lew said, and Bill added, "We built it for you, remember?" Then he laughed. "I'll bet you don't do any sleeping on it."

*March 8, 1944*

We took pictures of Don as he boarded the Pacific Electric for Fort McArthur this morning. My first son to enter training.

"Just going away to school," he called to me as the train pulled out. His wife and baby waved goodbye to him. We were all laughing. You would think we were happy to have him go.

Now I know how a mother feels when her son goes to war. Ever since my husband was appointed on the Selective Service Board he has dreaded the day when he would have to sign up his own son. It didn't work out that way.

*March 10, 1944*

We have a very attractive colored girl working on production now. Her man is overseas and she is working and saving to help with a new home when he gets back. She stopped me in the aisle today and surprised me by asking, "What kind of girdle do you wear?"

"What makes you ask that?" I countered.

"Well," she hesitated, "You're so fat, but you don't look it."

I didn't tell her I'm taking a beauty course, and have lost ten pounds.

*March 12, 1944*

I nearly missed seeing Don leave for Fort Knox this noon. I wonder how many young wives would have bothered to get in touch with their mother-in-law after the father-in-law said it couldn't be done. My baby. He may never come back. I may never see him again.

It wasn't until it was all over and we had eaten lunch with him and followed his train as far as the road led, that I knew how close I had come to not seeing him leave.

He had phoned his wife. They had orders to leave and would

be in the city two hours. She phoned my husband.

"You couldn't get Mother out of the plant," he had said. "I don't think they would let her out, and I wouldn't know how to go about it."

"Well," Wanda Belle said, "I'll bet Mother would quit her job rather than not see Don leave."

She recalled my talking about building twelve, and different Leadmen. "Do you mind if I try?" she asked.

I was called to the phone in the office. My husband's voice greeted me. "Do you think you can get off to see Don leave?"

"I'll meet you on the corner in front of the plant right away," I answered, and hung up the phone.

"How do you get out of this joint?" I asked the girl at the desk. She told me where to get a pass-out slip.

We drove by our house and I slipped into a clean slack suit. As much as I hated to have my boy remember me in pants, I couldn't spare the time to dress.

Again I ask, "How long, O Lord, how long?"

*April 1, 1944*

I was speechless this morning when a strange young man in a dark business suit stopped me in the aisle. "Isn't your name Gerken?" he asked.

Now what have I done? was my first reaction. It was 6:45 A.M. The machinery had not yet started, and his voice seemed to carry to the world.

"Yes," I said, "it is."

"You have a son working in Hollywood, haven't you?" he asked.

My heart stood still. "What's happened to him?" I gasped. Glen Jr. was working on a very "hush-hush" project. We believed it was something to do with radar. He evaded any question his father or I might ask. His wife was even more evasive.

"Oh, nothing happened to him," the young man assured me. "I just happened to work with him before I came into the plant last week."

"Oh!" My heart started beating again.

"I guess you know he's on his way back to Boston with a very secret blue print. He has to phone long distance back to the office every time the train stops. They wouldn't let him fly because the airways are being watched. He's quite a Big Shot, you know, and when he gets back he'll have something that will end the war right away."

I was furious. "If you've been here a week," I snapped, "you should be familiar with the signs: 'BUTTON UP YOUR LIPS'."

And they talk about women talking.

Maybe he was the F.B.I. pumping me.

*April 10, 1944*

I rushed around the counter this morning almost into the arms of tall, silent Albert. I hadn't seen him for weeks, and I didn't know what shift he was working on.

"How do you like the noise?" he greeted me.

"This is where you threatened to send me," I bantered, "Can't say as I like it."

"How'd you like me to take you out of here?"

I threw him a quick searching look. He was dead serious.

"That I would like!" I said emphatically.

"Well, get your things and let's go!"

"Bye, girls," I shouted as I grabbed my coat and purse, "I'll be back for my bench."

Albert was grinning as I trotted along beside him up the aisle to the north end of the building. "This isn't the job you are qualified for," he explained "but it is nice and quiet, and the girls you will work with are a lot of fun."

"Fun on 'Daze'? I have almost forgotten how much fun I had on Graveyard."

"No authority goes with the job, but you will have charge of your own stockroom. Nothing to worry you but the swing shift girl.

I'm going to like Ila and Veena. They received me with open arms. And warned me about the Swing shift girl. My stockroom is

at the south end of theirs and opens into it. The only counter I have is on production side, so I will have to receive my stock through their stockroom.

*May 1, 1944*

My troubles with Swing shift were short lived. They have removed the shift from this department. We can handle everything on Days. It is very monotonous. Same assemblies every day. Nothing but tubes—long tubes, short tubes, thin tubes, wide tubes, straight tubes, and crooked tubes. Reminds me of the dirty dishes in the sink. They always have to be washed—same dishes, same soap and water, day after day.

*May 4, 1944*

Albert stopped at the counter this morning, and gave me a quizzical look. "Are you so very unhappy?" he asked.

"Yes," I said, "I am. I can't stand sitting still in one place. For all the good I'm doing, I may as well check out."

"I suppose you don't realize that you're the only person pulling tube assemblies for the B-17."

"So what?" I wanted to know.

"So every B-17 we send over Germany or Japan has a tube assembly you have handed out. That's worth something, isn't it?"

"Yes, yes, it is," I said. "That really is something."

*June 2, 1944*

Today was open house at the plant. All employees were given tickets for their family. All week we "cleaned house." Straight new bin boxes replaced the bulging old ones. New bin cards carefully written displayed our best penmanship. Our floors and counters were immaculate. We are proud of our daytime home. It isn't a factory to us; it's a big house, and we are all a big loyal family.

*June 8, 1944*

I happened on a very solemn-looking affair yesterday at

lunch period. I had eaten and was speeding over to see Marguerite, but, as I entered building two, I ran into a group of about twenty workers standing in a circle. No one was eating. A tall, attractive brunette was facing me. She looked on the verge of tears. Her low, musical voice drew me closer. "I know how you all feel," she drawled. "Many of you never did like Minnie, but, as long as she died in our midst, I, for one, think we should do something about it. Whether we liked her or not, it's a cinch we will miss her scurrying in and out of the stockrooms."

They must be taking up a collection for flowers, I thought, so I edged up closer to see if I knew her. In a plant this large there are several Minnies. Just then the Lead man sauntered around a large jig, stretching his neck to see what was going on. "Well, I'll be damned," he sputtered.

The five minute warning bell rang and every one scattered. On a work bench was a tiny coffin put together with scraps of metal. It was lined with fine metallic shavings. At the head and foot was a spray of flowers made of bolts, nuts, and spacers, some covered with bright stockroom tape. In the center lay Minnie. She was a mouse

*June 22, 1944*

Editorial from Airview magazine:

"War is costly in money as well as lives. Before a soldier can participate in combat, the Quartermaster Corps estimates it spends \$440 in simply feeding and clothing him for a year.

"When the soldier is ready for combat, he must be equipped with certain basic weapons such as: .30 caliber semi-automatic M1 Garand rifle (cost \$80), a bayonet (cost \$5), and at least four hand grenades (cost \$6.24).

"A soldier may use a flame-thrower (cost \$950), may be part of a gun crew, working a 155-mm. howitzer (cost \$23,000), or keep in communication with other units by means of a walkie-talkie (\$200).

"Heavy bombers cost about \$250,000, medium bombers about \$110,000, and fighter planes about \$50,000. To make one medium



bomber takes about 13,000 man-hours. Food from 20 acres is needed to feed workers who build one bomber. Large bombers take 27,000 man-hours.

"Bombs weighing up to 4,000 pounds cost about \$875. Oxygen masks for the crew of a Flying Fortress cost about \$40. To each mask is attached a regulator costing \$60, and a \$25 oxygen cylinder from which the flyer draws his breath of life.

"To land the units for an invasion, highly specialized boats are put into action. The smallest type of self-propelled "crocodile boat" costs about \$18,500, and the highest model costs \$27,000. An ocean-going landing barge runs to about \$2 million.

"Ten .50 caliber machine guns firing at a maximum rate of fire for two hours and five minutes would use one million rounds of ammunition. It takes 1,832 workers to produce this number of rounds in one day.

"In one hour of firing, a 75-mm. field gun expends 7,250 pounds of copper, 3,000 pounds of zinc and 42,750 pounds of steel. A 105-mm cannon can shoot out more than 3 tons of steel in one hour of firing. The cost of the cannon, without its shells, is about \$13,000.

"In the Sicilian invasion, each mechanized division required 18,000 gallons of gasoline for every hour it was on the move.

"Even when an invasion force wins, it loses materiel. The cost of reaching the mainland of Italy, including the prelude of North Africa and Sicily, was 1,800 aircraft lost. In Sicily, 13 per cent of all the 155-mm. howitzers were lost, 8 per cent of the medium tanks and nearly 13 per cent of the 37-mm. guns.

"Maintenance alone of a single soldier overseas requires about 65 pounds of supplies per man each day.

"This is our war. It's up to each one of us to fight it, where we're needed most—with all our might, all the time. That will call for a certain amount of self-discipline and self-denial. And here again is a battle station for each of us—the weapon: our pocketbook; the objective: To help pay, to the best of our ability, part of the astronomical cost of planes, ships, tanks, guns and equipment.

This means: United States War Savings Bonds. Every one is asked to invest in them regularly, both during War Loan Drives and through the Payroll Savings Plan."

*August 8, 1944*

We are not supposed to leave our stockrooms unguarded, so I called to Veena and Ila as I swung out of the stockroom. "I'm going to outside storage," I said. Albert let out an amused laugh. I hadn't seen him standing outside the counter. I stopped short. "What's so funny?" I asked.

A silly grin lit up Veena's face, and Ila looked plenty guilty. "Funny is right," Albert agreed, "but go ahead. At least I believe you. You're not going out for a smoke."

I looked from one to the other, and then went on. When I came back with my arms full of tubes, Albert had gone, Veena was still grinning and Ila still had that puzzled look, as if she was the butt of the joke.

"Why can't I be in on the joke?" I asked.

"You can," Veena answered. "You jolly well can."

Ila started counting oxygen tanks and putting them on the shelf.

"I wanted a smoke," Veena said, "so I mentioned to Albert that I was going to outside storage to check something. Ila didn't hear me, but as I came back she said to me, 'I'm going to outside storage to check something.' Albert, of course, heard her. She had no more than got back when you pipe up with 'I'm going to outside storage.'"

We're still laughing about it.

*August 12, 1944*

Estrella, one of the girls who puts decals on the instrument boards, received word from her fiance's mother today that he had been killed in action. She withdrew the money they had been saving and sent it to his mother. A gallant gesture from a lovely girl.

*October 10, 1944*

Things sure happen unexpectedly around here. Albert came into the stockroom this morning bringing Ernestine with him. "This is to be your home now," he said to her.

"But no," she objected, "I'll not have Mable's stockroom. Are you checking her out?"

I stood there holding my breath. It was the first I had heard about being let out.

Ernestine pranced up and down the small stockroom. "What I can't understand is you being a Republican and Mable being a Republican, yet you let her out and give me her place. You know I'm a Democrat."

Albert smiled patiently. Turning to me he said, "What do you say, Mable?"

"What ever you say," I answered. "You're the boss."

"Spoken like a true Republican. That's the way I like my girls to talk," he said, taking my arm and guiding me to the next counter. "Maybe I have a better job for a Republican," he called back; then to me he said, "I had to put you in a stockroom where you could jump around."

Veena has been promoted to Production control dispatcher, but will spent part of her time with Ila and me.

*October 20, 1944*

Veena came to work Monday in an attractive two-piece gray checked slack suit. "Oh," Ila exclaimed, "Where did you get that suit and could you get size 18 for me?" "Me too," I said. "Size 20." Yesterday, we three girls in RP26E were dressed alike.

Albert stopped quick and looked us over. "Well," he said, "I guess I won't get you mixed up. One is loose, one just right," and as he looked at me, "one tight." I'll have to lose a few pounds.

*November 10, 1944*

Well, election is over. Also the tension. For the first time in history we have a third term president. According to the Republicans, America is sunk. We have a dictator we will never be able to

get out of the White House. According to the Democrats, we have another Jesus Christ. Another Saviour of Mankind.

It is surprising that after so many heated arguments, we are all friends. Only in America can we act like ferocious snarling dogs, tearing at each other's throats one minute, and be as a lion and a lamb resting together the next.

It was surprising how many were absent on election day. It would be interesting to know how many besides myself worked on the election board.

#### *November 30, 1944*

My diary is being neglected. There is plenty to write, but no time to write it. The holidays are here again, and we are still at war. Orders are still changed from day to day. The news is good one day and bad the next. We have to carry on.

#### *Christmas, 1944*

Another Christmas is over. One more dark, more terrible than the last one. There was to be no celebration. No day off. The line must be kept moving. We were allowed no Christmas trees, no mistletoe—but of course, like the children we are at heart, we got them into the plant. Some one brought a small branch of evergreen in the center of a bouquet of flowers. There were always flowers. Stripped of the flowers, the evergreen was a miniature tree. It was tied in the corner of the counter, and sprinkled with aluminum shavings—long silver-like strings. From time to time throughout the morning, someone placed a spacer or ring covered with stockroom tape of red, yellow, blue, and green. No one knew how the tree got there, or who decorated it.

About noon, Albert found it his duty to object. "Who is going to take that tape off and see that the parts are not destroyed?" he asked. No one answered.

"There will be a guard along soon," he said, "and he will give you your orders."

I followed him out into the aisle, "Honestly," I asked, "How many trees have you seen in the building?"

He smiled. "Too many," was all he said.

The guard appeared. "You'll have to take that tree down!"

"Yes, I know," I answered, "We're going to get at it soon."

An hour later the guard was back. "You'll have to take that tree down," he said again. "It's against the rules."

"Yes, we know," Veena answered. "We're swamped with pulls right now, but we'll get at it."

Albert came along about that time. Before he could say anything I said, "Can't you get us some help; we can't seem to get caught up enough to take this tree down."

His eyes twinkled as he said sternly, "There must be an awful lot of people absent. No one seems to find time to take any tree down." A girl from production was listening. All at once she walked over and kissed Albert. He was standing under some mistletoe. (Why didn't I see that?)

*January 28, 1945*

Sally checked out today. We took up a collection, and I was asked to buy her a purse. Instead of wrapping it, I left my purse home and carried it in. I thought I was quite clever until I opened it at the gate. All I had in it was my coin purse. No badge, no identification card. The guard gave me a sharp look and said, "You'll have to get in line over at the window."

If you forget your badge, they give you a temporary one, but if you don't have an identification card, that's another story. I was escorted to the police department to remain until my supervisor called for me. I couldn't check in, so of course I wasn't getting paid.

I had waited thirty minutes when a well-dressed young man stepped in, looked around, and turned to leave. There was no one there but me. "Say," I called to him, "You wouldn't be looking for me would you?"

"Are you Mable Gerken?" he asked. Then we both laughed, because he was new in the department and I didn't know him from Adam. He didn't know me either. I explained the situation, and he escorted me to my stockroom.



*March 15, 1945*

The carpenters are busy again. Another change. They are building a three-foot fence around the office. They made just one gate at the south end on the main aisle. It's amusing to see the men and women from the north end of the building. Rather than walk around, they swing over. The tall ones do it easy. I haven't tried it—yet.

Ila was so mad this morning. A man from another department bawled her out because her bin ship-short didn't balance with his. Albert came through about that time, and she said, "Albert, I'm so mad, the madder I sit here the longer I get."

Needless to say she wasn't mad any longer.

*March 17, 1945*

St. Patrick wasn't forgotten in the plant today. There is a spattering of green blouses, ties, and ribbons. Also some very unusual decorations. Van came into the stockroom early. "What do I have to do to get a piece of green tape?" she asked Veena.

Veena grinned. "Well," she said, "it's nice that you ask for it. It sure does annoy us to have someone swipe the whole roll. How much do you need?"

"Oh, about six inches."

Veena looked her surprise and Van laughed. "I'm going to make a V on the front of my blouse."

Later another girl came in with five curly green caps similar to a pop bottle cap. They are clamped over the tubes to keep the dust out until they are used. She wanted a little green tape for leaves and stems. She had quite a corsage.

*March 22, 1945*

Here's a little personal incident that probably doesn't belong in an aircraft story, but on the other hand I guess it does, as it shows one more thing that we women have to go through after we have put in eight hours at the plant.

It was raining the proverbial cats and dogs as I arrived home. I turned the key and pushed open the front door to hear the most

hair-raising sound. It was as though a flood of water were rushing down a hill. After a hard day's work, it sounded like Niagara Falls. I threw off my raincoat as I made a dash for the bathroom. I could see it wasn't the kitchen. The odor of damp wool greeted me, and I found the hot water pipe under the wash basin pulled out.

Water was shooting straight across the room, splashing against the tile bath tub, and squirting back towards the wash basin. It covered the tile floor, and was running into the hall and both bed rooms. I waded through, and put my hand over the water pipe. The force was so strong it pushed my hand away, making a whirl of gushing water which showered me. I grabbed a wash cloth to poke into the pipe, but that didn't work. I was soaked from head to foot, and the water had started running into the dining room.

I rushed to the phone and dialed my husband's office. A man answered and said "Mr. Gerken isn't here." "Well, someone will have to get over here at once," I shouted, "the water pipe has broken and the house is flooded with water!"

As I started to slam the receiver on the hook I heard a voice say, "Who's speaking please?" It's a good thing I didn't hang up quicker, or I might still be trying to stop the water.

I rushed back to the bathroom and managed to get the pipe back where it belonged. It wasn't broken, just pulled apart. Perhaps a slight earthquake had caused it.

I heard a car stop, and realized the door had locked when I closed it, so I dropped the pipe and dashed to the door. The water shot out again.

"You look like a drowned rat," the man greeted me. He found the outside water shut-off, and turned it. I commenced to breathe again.

Instead of dinner being ready as usual, my husband found me dipping water with bath towels. I had three heavy towels, would drop one in the water, pick up another, squeeze it into a bucket, drop it and pick up another.

He took up the soaked hall rug, lifted the trap door and found the furnace submerged. The water must have been running most

of the day. After bailing water with a bucket for an hour, while I was "squeezing it up" in the bathroom, we finally saw bottom.

The hall and bedroom rugs had to be sent to the cleaners. We lifted the edge of the dining room rug and poked papers under it.

My husband fixed the pipe. I would sleep easier if a plumber had done it, but just try to get a plumber! They are working in aircraft factories or shipyards.

Ila received a letter from her husband today. She is up in the clouds again. When she doesn't hear from him, she is in the depths of despair, and when she does, she walks on air. She is especially hilarious today because he said, "Don't be alarmed because I am sending my clothing home." She will probably watch the windows and doors from now on until he arrives. It wouldn't surprise me a bit if she checks out. And then will the rest of us have to work? Boy!

*April 12, 1945*

Swing shift surged into the plant this afternoon calling to every one, "Have you heard the dreadful news? President Roosevelt just died." The word sped through all departments in hushed voices. No one had actually heard the announcement—some one had told them. It came by way of the grapevine; yet, accustomed as we were to all kinds of rumors, we felt instinctively that such a thing would not be started unless it were true.

All during the past campaign and election, there had been heated arguments for and against Roosevelt. There are Republicans and Democrats in every department. However, as the word spread of Roosevelt's death, there were no wisecracks. No repeating the cruel, unkind wishes that he would die, that that was the only way we would ever have a free people again. No repeating that the war was lost if Truman ever had to take over. Nothing but a hushed silence that made the noises of the plant more noisy.

Leaving the building at 3:30, the loud speaker was giving us

the news. "It is with deep regret and sorrow that we announce the death of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt." That was all. Over and over again it was repeated as more and more workers swarmed out of the many buildings.

They paused to hear the words, then walked on with bowed heads, through the tunnels into the parking lot, to their cars.

*April 14, 1945*

There has been a great deal of speculation as to what would happen if Roosevelt died, a great deal of concern and doubt as to Truman's ability to carry on. I'm recording here the text of Truman's Mourning proclamation taken from the April 14, 1945 *Times*.

*Washington, April 13*

"TO THE PEOPLE OF THE UNITED STATES: It has pleased God in his infinite wisdom to take from us the immortal spirit of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, the 32nd President of the United States.

"The leader of his people in a great war, he lived to see the assurance of the victory but not to share it. He lived to see the first foundations of the free and peaceful world to which his life was dedicated, but not to enter on that world himself.

"His fellow countrymen will sorely miss his fortitude and faith and courage in the time to come.

"The peoples of the earth who love the ways of freedom and hope will mourn him.

"But though his voice is silent, his courage is not spent, his faith is not extinguished. The courage of great men outlives them to become the courage of their people and the peoples of the world. It lives beyond them and upholds their purposes and brings their hopes to task.

"Now, therefore, I, Harry Truman, President of the United States of America, do appoint Saturday next, April 14, the day of the funeral service for the dead President, as a day of mourning and prayer throughout the United States. I earnestly recommend the people to assemble on that day in their respective places of divine worship, there to bow down in submission to the will of Almighty God, and to pay out of

full hearts their homage of love and reverence to the memory of the great and good man whose death they mourn.

"In witness whereof I have hereunto set my hand and caused the seal of the United States to be affixed.

"Done at the city of Washington, the 13th day of April, in the year of our Lord, one thousand nine hundred and forty-five, and of the independence of the United States, the one hundred and sixty-ninth.

*Signed, HARRY S. TRUMAN*"

Here are a few headlines from the same paper:

"Vienna Falls; Russ Capture 130,000 Nazis"

"Allied Flyers Smash Japs' Suicide Corps"

"Yanks Nearly Cut Germany In Half"

"Truman Assures World on War Aims"

"Roosevelt's Body Begins Journey To Washington"

*May 9, 1945*

Yesterday was V.E. Day. Victory in Europe. The world looks brighter today. Everyone is excited with anticipation. The auditors have moved into 26E. Josephine is my assistant, or rather, I am hers. Personally, I feel like a fat, squatty Pekinese dog tagging along behind a thoroughbred blood hound as we chase down the origin of each part. We take the number of the part from our bin box, the assembly it goes on, and a sample part. Then we go out on the line, and find how many parts they have in process and how many completed assemblies.

We take Lonnie, or Elmer, or Jean—whoever happens to be Leadman on that particular job, so they can show us where the assembly is on the plane.

Some are in the cockpit, some in the bomb bay room, and some in the radio room. We have to get down on our knees and crawl under the plane to get inside certain sections. Then, of course, we have to get back out the same way. It's a good thing we have to wear pants.

After we have located all available parts, we count what we have in our bin and what's in overstock. The entire amount is then added to the number of the next ship to be installed, and that



gives us our "ship-short." In other words, the number of the first ship that will be without that particular part.

We found several funny errors, but I think the hose was the funniest. We checked the male hose first and found them a hundred ships short. Then we checked the female hose and found them three hundred ships over. Josephine looked at me inquiringly, "Do you suppose the females multiplied?" she asked. "No, I think not," I answered, "I think when we check them over carefully we'll find some of the males in the wrong box."

*May 19, 1945*

Ernestine and Ruth are helping invoice R.P.28A. I glanced up there today and saw them laughing hysterically. Finally Ernestine came down to R.P.26A. "I think I have heard you say you were going nuts," she gasped between giggles, "Now what do you think about me?"

She placed two sacks on the counter, both marked 100 pieces. One sack was about twenty times as large as the other. "They both came out of the same bin," she explained, "and we have been four hours counting the little sacks before we noticed the big ones were also marked 100 pieces."

"How'd you ever happen to open the big ones?" I asked, looking in both bags. When I saw what was in the big one, I, too, got hysterical. We laughed until one of the Leadmen saw us and came over.

"What's going on?" he asked.

Ernestine calmed down long enough to explain. "Either someone can't count, or we can't," Ruth had said to her. "If there are 100 pieces in these little sacks, there must be a thousand or more in those." So they opened the large one and found 100 of the parts that belonged in the bin, all properly stamped with the right number. They had been counting 100 tiny round micardo discs.

The Leadman looked disgusted. "I'll bet you don't even know what you were sacking," he snapped.

Ernestine admitted she didn't.

"Well," he said, "I've heard of selling the hole in the dough-

nut. That's the hole that was pushed out when the part was made. It should have been discarded in building four. It should never have been in a stockroom."

Ernestine and I still think it's funny.

*June 14, 1945*

Albert handed me my transfer to building one, department 385E. It read: "Production Control Dispatcher. \$1.10 pr hour."

"You can run over some time this afternoon and look it over," he said. (A lot of good that will do me.)

I am to work out of R.P.G. Ida, an A. stock clerk, received me like a long lost sister. She is a very charming person, with reddish brown hair cut rather short and curled about her ears. She has a deep dimple in her left cheek. She calls it her manufactured dimple. I'll have to learn more about that. Wonder what I'd look like with a dimple?

*June 15, 1945*

Albert checked out today. One of many to check out.

*June 27, 1945*

We sure had some excitement this morning. Two big guards came stalking into the department, and escorted Jerry out. Jerry is quite a character. We have been expecting something to happen to her, but no matter how much you are prepared, you're always shocked when it does happen. Jerry is almost as large as the guards. Her bleached blond hair was cut short like a man's and didn't look as though it would recognize a comb if it were introduced. Of course rumors flew. We all know Jerry is a wrestler. She calls herself a professional. It seems she had a fight last night, got liquored up this morning, and came to work. She isn't the type anyone can hide under a counter until she sobers up.

*June 28, 1945*

I ran into Angee in R.P.821 this morning. I found her all in a dither because they had put her in a stockroom with

another A stock clerk. She was resented. Same old story, no house big enough for two families. I am saved that trouble so far by being termed a dispatcher. Ida is an A stock clerk. She seems quite happy because I can do whatever she asks me to. However, an A stock clerk was let out when I was transferred. We hardly know what is best for us to do. Should those of us who do not have to work, quit? Or are they laying off the shirkers and are we needed more than ever? Well, surely it won't be much longer now.

Ida got excused at noon yesterday. She's not feeling so good today. She went to the races. Lost \$48.00 betting to win and \$22.00 betting to show. \$2.00 was my money.

*June 30, 1945*

Well, I put my foot into it again today. The longer you work here the less tact you have. Swing shift sent tubes to overstock, and dated the entry two days previous. That led me to believe the ones received today had not been entered. To be sure, of course, I had to take inventory from ship installation to stock room. The Leadman on production told me they were stored in R. P. 813 after being completed. I went to 813. There was no stock girl there, so I started counting them. They were two inches in diameter and stacked two feet across and three feet high. I was looking at the ends of them. The rows were crooked and I was having trouble counting them when a man stepped up to me and said, "Why don't you take the ship-short from the bin card?" He was a clean-cut, middle aged fellow with iron gray hair, steel eyes, and a pleasant smile. I had no idea whether he was General Hoosit, the F.B.I.—or the clean-up man. "You can't trust a bin card!" I stated emphatically.

His eyes flashed and his mouth became a tight straight line. He looked mad enough to slap me. "Where is the stock girl?" I asked.

"I'm the stock girl!" he announced.

I had to talk fast to get out of that one.

*July 5, 1945*

Betty, beautiful as ever, still smelling of roses, slid through the wire gate into our stock room.

"Imagine meeting you here," I joked, "after a year or two or a hundred."

"You're just the gal I'm looking for. I have good news." She smiled, and the months of hard labor, confusion, and doubt slipped away, and I remembered the first day (or night) I saw her. I think I shall always remember her as she came down the aisle from the supervisor's desk in her purple slack suit, yellow blouse, and bobby sox, and a yellow rose in her hair. To me she was and will remain a breath of clean fresh air in an otherwise air-conditioned universe—the promise of spring in the middle of a desolate winter. It was January of 1943. Was there ever a more desolate, more desperate, more precarious time? I relived the scene in a flash. Betty had introduced Martha and me to Bill, the B-Lead man on the skinning jigs—Bill, with his tight ringlet hair turning gray prematurely; Bill, who showed us how to put the skin on the bombers, and told us we were to be called "Skinners."

Where is Bill now? The last I heard he was in the Marines. And, for that matter, where is Martha, and where are her four sons?

Betty's voice brought me back to the present. Her eyes were twinkling. "You want to go home?" she asked. Those were the words I had been waiting for. She turned to Willie, the shortage man. "You watch the window," she ordered, "Mable is going with me."

I smiled to myself as I remembered writing in my diary, "I think the real supervisor of our department is Betty." She is handling this checking out as though it were her own idea, getting the war over efficiently with no one left over. She has truly proven wrong the old saying, "Beautiful but dumb."

I was bursting with questions as we walked down the noisy aisle to the office. "Where is David now?" was the first one. She didn't know, hadn't seen him for over a year. I watched her face

for a sign of grief or disappointment. She was all smiles. "And the nice young chap who hung over your desk between shift?"

"Oh," she laughed, "I married him."

*July 6, 1945*

I sat on a bench in the office yesterday while three people were being interviewed. Then I was asked a few questions and was told they would notify me. I went back to the stock room. As yet I wasn't laid off. This "lay-off" rumor is getting to be a joke. We've been hearing it for weeks. The gates are going to close! The company will have hundreds of planes on hand! The government itself will be broke! Our war bonds will be worthless!

I really wonder how many employees are being let out each day. Everyone is bumping or being bumped. The little fellow with the least seniority is terminated. More and more A-Leads are becoming B-Leads, B-Leads are becoming C-Leads, and C-Leads are going to work.

*July 13, 1945*

The loud speaker blasted out today that production on the bomber is to be halted immediately. Three thousand employees are being let out. Paradoxically, it announced that two other plants are in desperate need of more employees. Rumor has it that the B-17 is obsolete. Can you imagine that? One of the nation's outstanding war planes. It was a major instrument of the bombing of Germany into defeat. Obsolete. Again the rumor: other plants discontinued the B-17 some time ago to concentrate on the larger B-29.

*July 27, 1945*

The plant is removing its camouflage village. Down is coming the mock village on top of the roofs of the buildings and across the streets. The apartments, roads, trees, and shrubs are disappearing as if by magic. There will be no more jokes about renting an apartment on the roof to be close to work. No more sending new employees to the office for rental agreements.



*August 8, 1945*

News of Russia declaring war via the grapevine. Then the loud speaker declaring, "President Truman announced 'Russia declares war on Japan.'" Everyone took it calmly. You'd never know from the appearances of the workers that we had been tense over Russia for a long time—that there had been much speculation as to how long it would take to finish us if Russia joined with Germany and Japan.

Public speakers were prophesying, "Watch Russia. As Russia goes, so goes the war." We were watching Russia. But Hitler overstepped when he tangled with Stalin. Russia is on our side for the present. I wonder how long?

*August 14, 1945*

The war is over. The war is over. The war is over. I jumped out of my "share-the-ride" car today in front of the grocery store. Mrs. Eden shouted at me before my feet hit the ground. "The war is over," she yelled, "The war is over—The war is over."

She grabbed me and we danced around and round singing, "The war is over—The war is over—The war is over." Then I remembered all the rumors of the past. "How do you know?" I demanded.

"President Truman just announced it over the radio; I heard it."

I rushed to the phone and called the plant. I got our department. "The war is over," I shouted. "The war is over." Just like that!

The evening paper says "Two-day holiday for all plant workers."

*August 17, 1945*

I returned to work at seven A.M. The loud speaker kept repeating "Instructions are on your time card. Read them carefully. If you do not understand them, see your Supervisor."

On my notice it said, "We regret to inform you that due to the necessity for a reduction in the number of employees in your

job classification, you will be subject to layoff at the close of your shift on Friday, August 17th, 1945." And, this is August 17, 1945.

If they only knew how happy it made so many of us. You could see it on every one's face. Men and women were pushing here and there through the streets between the buildings and in the aisles inside. They were laughing and joking, recalling the fun they had had together and promising to meet each other again. "We'll never forget," they were saying, "We'll never forget."

Men and women were lined up at all department offices waiting their termination. I met Dotty, who was also a production control dispatcher, and we ambled over to Building One where our office is. From there we were sent to Building Twelve to check our badges, identification cards, and tools.

Several desks were set up in the big open space that had formerly been B-17 fuselages, so we had no waiting. Then we walked out on the flight ramp, and took a last look at the row of planes. We snooped around the huge new transport that had just been completed. The first one off the line. Then back to building two, past the last stock rooms I had supervision of. Two girls were counting parts. One of them was Ernestine, the girl who had objected to taking my stock room away from me so long ago.

"Hi, Democrat!" I waved to her.

She waved back, "Hi, yourself, Republican!" she answered.

She never had understood why Albert had given her my stock room, inasmuch as he was a Republican and so was I, and she was a Democrat. Those were hectic days, last November, but politics really had nothing to do with my transfer.

As I paused at the wire gate, I saw myself that first day in Building Two. I was perched on top of the ladder where I wasn't supposed to be, checking a small assembly, when the A-Lead swung through the gate, and said, "Mable, can you check a part from ship to stockroom?"

"I guess I can," I had hesitated. It was a new building, a new ship, new stock room, new stock, and new personnel. But what the heck?

"Well, it's a good thing you can," he announced, "because you have charge of R.P. 123 and 125."

And now it is over.

Dotty and I sauntered over toward Building Nine where divisions were roped off according to departments. A huge A.B.C.D. etc. hung on round signs under which were listed our department number. Department 385 was under B. It was a small line, perhaps fifty people ahead of us. Many lines were five or six times as long.

We were handed two checks as we gave the girl our time card. One was for last week, the other for three days this week. We had Wednesday and Thursday as holidays without pay.

We strolled on through the tunnel for the last time, shaking hands and bidding everyone goodbye. There was something rather sad about those last few minutes—saying a final goodbye to friends who were going to scatter to all ends of the earth. The farmers back to their Nebraska or Kansas farms; merchants back to a little Iowa or Dakota town to realize their dream of a small business of their own; dairymen back to their cows; milliners back to their hats; even the housewives, back to their perpetual sink of dirty dishes.

Now it is 1949. Six years from my entrance into a war plant. We women are all six years older. Six years doesn't mean much to those who were twenty to thirty years old then, but where is the woman past seventy who sat daily at the electric wire spool measuring and cutting accurately the wires that went on the instrument board of the B-17? Where are the women past fifty and sixty? Will they, if another war develops, be able to carry on again? Or will they sit back and let those who were too young to work in World War Two carry the burden?

I can answer only for myself and those with whom I have kept in contact. It is like the answer that our boys are giving. "God deliver us from ever having to, but, if there is danger of losing our freedom, our privilege of deciding for ourselves whether we pull the cart or ride and let our feet drag, then you will find the American women once again surging earnestly across the parking lots, through the tunnels and gates into another fight for freedom."









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## DATE DUE

DEC 28 1993			
DEC 28 1993 RCD			
MAY 16 1994			
MAY 16 1994 RCD			
wumth 119			
OCT 25 1994 RCD			
DEC 23 1994			
FACULTY/STAFF			
JAN 11 1995 RCL			
MAY 22 1995			
MAY 22 1995 RCD			
MAY 20 1996			
MAY 20 1996 RCD			
STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY			
OF WISCONSIN			
816 State Street			
Madison, Wisconsin 53706			

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